Unit 8, Session 1

The Call to Courage

Summary and Goal
Forty years earlier, the Israelites had failed to trust God and refused to enter into the promised land God had given them. Because of their faithlessness, God forced that generation to wander in the wilderness until all of them, except Joshua and Caleb, had died off. Now it was time for the next generation, those who were children or who were born during the wilderness wandering, to enter the land. In this session, we will see that God called on this generation to follow Him in faith, just as He had called the previous generation. And once again, God revealed His presence and power to His people. But this generation would do what their parents and grandparents had failed to do—they trusted the Lord.

Session Outline
1. God goes with His people to give them strength and courage (Josh. 1:6-9).
2. God goes before His people to demonstrate His power (Josh. 3:5-8,14-17).
3. God calls His people to remember and testify to what He has done (Josh. 4:20-24).

Session in a Sentence
God goes before His people with power to give us courage to follow wherever He goes.

Christ Connection
God went before Joshua and the Israelites into the land and showed His power to them so they would trust in Him. When Jesus came into the world, He showed His power so that we would trust in Him and receive salvation through Him.

Missional Application
Because Christ has gone before us in death and resurrection and provided salvation, we recount all of God’s mighty works to others so that they too may know Him and His power and be received into His kingdom.
Group Time

Introduction

INTERACT: Ask group members to share briefly some answers to the opening question in the DDG (p. 48).

If you had a do-over for any day in your past, where would you use it? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Use the content in the DDG (p. 48) to highlight the significance of a “do-over,” both personally and in the biblical story found in the Book of Joshua.

A hypothetical do-over typically involves some regret, but starting over in reality often comes with a sense of power and freedom.

- Sports fans understand that the start of each new season brings with it the ability to put any woes of the prior season in the past and replace them with hope for what lies ahead, at least for a game or two.
- Some of the best entrepreneurs look back at a time when they failed and were forced to start over as the key moment that led to their success.
- Sometimes we experience the gift of a new start in small, ordinary ways: tossing a failed recipe and starting over from scratch, erasing an email draft and writing it over, or stopping a difficult conversation midway through and asking the other person if you can start over again.

The Book of Joshua in the Bible is a do-over God granted the next generation of Israelites after wandering in the wilderness for forty years because of the unbelief and disobedience of the previous generation. But would they do what their parents and grandparents had failed to do—would they trust God and follow His commands?

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will see that God called on this generation to follow Him in faith, just as He had called the previous generation. And once again, God revealed His presence and power to His people that they should trust Him and the new leader He appointed for the Israelites.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
**Point 1: God goes with His people to give them strength and courage (Josh. 1:6-9).**

**SAY:** Moses was dead, but the Israelites still had Joshua. He had been Moses’ aide almost from the beginning of their journey, and God had appointed him as Moses’ successor. Now, during this critical moment of leadership transition, in preparation for his first act as leader, God spoke to Joshua.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Joshua 1:6-9 (DDG p. 49), and ask group members to circle the times God tells Joshua to “be strong and courageous.”

> 6 “Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance. 7 Above all, be strong and very courageous to observe carefully the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. 8 This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. 9 Haven’t I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

**INSTRUCT:** Ask groups of 3-4 to use the table in their DDG (p. 49) to list Joshua’s duties and God’s promises included in this passage. After a couple of moments, allow the groups to share their responses with the larger group. The items on their lists should reflect on some level the two lists below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joshua’s Duties</th>
<th>God’s Promises</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be Strong and Courageous</td>
<td>Give the Land to His People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute the Land</td>
<td>Provide Prosperity and Success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carefully Observe God’s Instruction</td>
<td>Always Be with Joshua</td>
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<td>Speak God’s Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meditate on God’s Law</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do Not Be Afraid or Discouraged</td>
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**EXPLAIN:** Reference the paragraph in the DDG (p. 49) as you use the leader content below to explain three reasons Joshua was to “be strong and courageous”: to conquer and distribute the land, to observe carefully God’s instruction, and because God was with him.

Why would God repeatedly instruct Joshua to “be strong and courageous”? For starters, Joshua needed to hear this message. He needed the encouragement because of the challenge that was before him. Joshua was to be strong and courageous first, to conquer and distribute the land (v. 6), second, to observe carefully God’s instruction (vv. 7-8), and third, because God was with him (v. 9).
• First, Joshua was to be strong and courageous to conquer and distribute the land (v. 6). Before the Israelites could possess the land, they would first have to conquer it. The Canaanites were not just going to walk out of the promised land because the Israelites walked in with a claim on it. So Joshua needed strength and courage to lead the Israelites into battle. But even more importantly, Joshua was to have strength and courage because their victory would not come from their military shrewdness or might but from the sure promise of God—God had chosen this land for the descendants of Abraham.

• Second, Joshua was to be strong and very courageous to observe carefully God’s instruction (vv. 7-8). The Pentateuch, the five books of the Law, had been written down by Moses before his death (Deut. 31:9). Joshua would need the law to flow continually from his mouth, and he would need to meditate on it, to ponder and seek to understand it. If he were to do this, he would be able to obey it, and this was key, because through obedience, he and the people would find success in the promised land.

• Third, Joshua was to be strong and courageous, not afraid or discouraged, because God was with him (v. 9). This was the key to it all. Joshua’s courage was to come from God, who was with him. Not from his leadership abilities. Not from his wisdom. Not from the might of his military. Not from the praise of his people. There was nothing wrong with any of those things, but the root of Joshua’s courage was to be the one thing that mattered most: God’s presence.

Commentary: Joshua wasn’t the only one in the Scriptures to find strength and courage in God’s presence. David found confidence in saying, “I fear no danger, for you are with me” (Ps. 23:4, emphasis added). Zephaniah assured God’s people that God was in their midst (Zeph. 3:17). The prophet Isaiah’s words came true when it was said of Jesus, “See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated ‘God is with us’” (Matt. 1:23, emphasis added; see also Isa. 7:14).

SAY: Joshua had seen God draw near to Moses and guide him through adversity, and he could believe that same presence was with him. Like Joshua, we too can walk in confident faith because God is with us. When we walk with Almighty God, when we follow Jesus, He gives us the courage we need to overcome all our fears.

INTERACT: Ask group member the following questions.

What are some ways we can know and experience the presence of God? (through reading, speaking, and meditating on God’s Word; through stepping out in faith to obey God’s instructions; through fellowship with God’s people in Christ)
**Point 2:** God goes before His people to demonstrate His power (Josh. 3:5-8,14-17).

**PACK ITEM 6: THE CONQUEST MAP:** Reference this map poster for this point to note that the Israelites crossed the Jordan River opposite Jericho.

**SAY:** The Israelites were preparing to cross the Jordan River opposite Jericho and to leave behind forty years of wilderness wandering. Yet the moment they stepped foot on the other side of the river, they would be at risk, so they needed to be strong and courageous. But how would they cross this river?

**READ** Joshua 3:5-8,14-17 (DDG p. 50).

5 Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, because the LORD will do wonders among you tomorrow.” 6 Then he said to the priests, “Carry the ark of the covenant and go on ahead of the people.” So they carried the ark of the covenant and went ahead of them.

7 The LORD spoke to Joshua: “Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so they will know that I will be with you just as I was with Moses. 8 Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant: When you reach the edge of the water, stand in the Jordan.”

14 When the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carried the ark of the covenant ahead of the people. 15 Now the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest season. But as soon as the priests carrying the ark reached the Jordan, their feet touched the water at its edge 16 and the water flowing downstream stood still, rising up in a mass that extended as far as Adam, a city next to Zarethan. The water flowing downstream into the Sea of the Arabah—the Dead Sea—was completely cut off, and the people crossed opposite Jericho. 17 The priests carrying the ark of the LORD’s covenant stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed on dry ground until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the paragraph in the DDG (p. 50) to explain the significance of the ark of the covenant leading the way through the Jordan River and into the promised land.

God commanded that the ark of the covenant, carried on the shoulders of priests, lead the way through the Jordan River and into the promised land. The ark represented the word, power, and presence of God. God was making it clear from the start of the conquest that He would lead the way and win the victory. The still waters and dry riverbed for passage as soon as the priests stepped in proved His power once again.
FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 50).

God Is Omnipotent: God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Omnipotent”: God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

EXPLAIN how this event connects with the previous generation of Israelites passing through the Red Sea on dry ground.

- Forty years before this, the previous generation of Israelites had escaped war with the Egyptians by God walling up the waters of the Red Sea. God had rescued them through the waters and then fought for them by releasing the waters to swallow the mighty Egyptian army.
- Now here, once again, God was stopping the waters of the Jordan River, serving as the second bookend of the wilderness wandering. God had commanded Joshua to declare all of what Moses had written, and so, he likely reminded the people of how their parents and grandparents had crossed the Red Sea before. Their trust in God was to be rooted in God’s faithfulness in the past, in the promises He had made, and in the power He put on display for them.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

? How do we witness the power of God today? (we see and hear of God’s provision that defies explanation; we recognize in ourselves as believers that we are growing in our faith and becoming more like Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit; we share the gospel and witness it changing the hearts of unbelievers so that they begin to follow Jesus in faith and obey Him through the waters of baptism)
Point 3: God calls His people to remember and testify to what He has done (Josh. 4:20-24).

**SAY:** God told the Israelites to remember this miracle of crossing the Jordan River on a dry riverbed, and He gave them a way to do just that. He knew they would be prone to forget, just as we are, so God commanded Joshua to have one man from each tribe select a stone from the Jordan River bed, twelve stones in total (4:1-3). These stones would be a memory peg for the Israelites.

**READ** Joshua 4:20-24 (DDG p. 51).

> Then Joshua set up in Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan, and he said to the Israelites, “In the future, when your children ask their fathers, ‘What is the meaning of these stones?’ you should tell your children, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the water of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, just as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up before us until we had crossed over. This is so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD’s hand is mighty, and so that you may always fear the LORD your God.”

**EXPLAIN:** Reference the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 51) as you explain the significance of the twelve stones coming from the middle of the Jordan River: the point of God’s providence, the point of greatest danger, and the point of the people’s faith.

Twelve stones set up in Gilgal, the Israelites’ battle camp, would provide a reminder of God’s faithfulness and plan for generations. But God didn’t want the people to take just any stones. They were to take stones from the middle of the Jordan River (4:5), which was also where the priests stood firm with the ark (4:10). Taking stones from this spot represented at least three things: the point of God’s providence, the point of greatest danger, and the point of the people’s faith.

- **The point of God’s providence.** The Israelites were to gather the stones from where the priests continued to stand, holding the ark, symbolizing God’s presence. They were a reminder that God was the One holding back the waters, allowing the people to cross and the twelve men to retrieve stones that had been submerged previously in the flowing waters of the Jordan.

- **The point of greatest danger.** If the people feared that the waters would come rushing back over them, which they may have because they hurried across, the middle of the river would be the most dangerous place to be. This would be where the ground was the lowest and the farthest from the safety of the banks.

- **The point of the people’s faith.** God performed the miracle to pave the way, but the Israelites still had to step out in faith and pass across the riverbed. It was in the middle, at the point of greatest danger, where the Israelites’ trust in God was most evident. They needed to remember that they did believe God and that He was worthy of their faith, both then and throughout the conquest and beyond.
**SAY:** With these stones, the Israelites were to remember not just the miracle but also the God behind the miracle. In our forgetfulness, faith and remembrance can easily turn into idolatry. We likely have our own stones and markers of remembrance, but we should never get caught up in God’s many provisions and forget Him.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

What stones of remembrance have you set up, or can you set up, to help you remember our powerful and faithful God? *(be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)*

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 51) to emphasize how the Israelites were to use the stones to remember God and to proclaim His glory to the next generation.

The Israelites’ memory of God’s power and provision was not only for those who made the journey across the Jordan but was also for their descendants. As the people continued to grow, children who had not witnessed the river crossing would see the stones and be prompted to ask about them. The stones, then, offered God’s people a way to remember God and to proclaim His glory.

**SAY:** Like the Israelites, we are to proclaim to others what God has done. They had stones to help them pass on the true story of God’s faithfulness and power. But the story of God’s Word comes to its pinnacle with another stone of great importance: the stone rolled away from Jesus’ empty tomb. We share with others our living Savior, how God sent Christ to go before us, to display His power, and to lead us unto salvation.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

How can you use what God has done, your stones of remembrance, to point others to the power and beauty of the gospel? *(be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)*
My Mission

EXPLAIN: If we aren’t careful, we can find ourselves a little envious of the Israelites. After all, sensing God’s presence, seeing His power, can be so difficult today. We don’t have an ark, we don’t see waters walled up, we haven’t feasted on manna from heaven. But the truth is the Israelites would be envious of us because we have something far better—we have the living Christ. Those who have believed have feasted on Christ Jesus, the true bread from heaven. We may not have witnessed waters held back, but believers have experienced their sin cast away and Christ’s righteousness overflow in its place. And instead of the ark of the covenant, the followers of Christ have the indwelling presence of God to lead them. Christ went before us in power, laid down His life on a cross, and was raised again in victory to provide our salvation and bring us into spiritual rest.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 52), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because Christ has gone before us in death and resurrection and provided salvation, we recount all of God’s mighty works to others so that they too may know Him and His power and be received into His kingdom.

- What steps of faith are you being led to take by the omnipotent God?
- How has God worked in the life of your group, and how can your group commemorate His work together?
- What are some opportunities you have to share of God’s power and provision in Jesus Christ for the salvation of all who believe in Him?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Holy God, You have revealed Yourself as all-powerful through Your faithfulness to Your people. Forgive us for failing to trust You despite Your repeated acts of mercy and might throughout covenant history. Help us to live with faith and courage as we step forward to participate in the advance of Your Son’s kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel. Amen.

PACK ITEM 7: THE CONQUEST HANDOUT: Pass out a copy of this handout to each group member to aid them as they read the Scriptures on Joshua’s campaigns in the promised land in the Daily Study devotions throughout this unit.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 53-55), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 56) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 53-55) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 56) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 53-55) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 2 as a part of point 3 in the session: In Christ, we are able, for the first time ever, to cast aside our labor—our numerous attempts to be right with God—and instead rest in Christ as recipients of God’s forgiveness and righteousness in Him.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 1: “Good leaders are a gift from God. Great leaders are a blessing. But no leader, no matter how good he or she might be, is a substitute for God Himself.”
- Day 5: “We are to teach others God’s Word, but we are also to testify to how God has been kind to us.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 56) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to remind one another that God always provides the strength and courage we need for whatever He calls us to do for Him.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1:** God goes with His people to give them strength and courage (Josh. 1:6-9).

“This command to Joshua marks a major turning point in the communication between God and his people, especially with regard to knowing God’s will. Up to this point God had revealed his will to his people through dreams, visions, angels, prophets and even directly in person. But it appears that God is telling Joshua that whatever he may need to know has already been revealed and put down in writing by Moses in the Book of the Law, Joshua was therefore not to wait for dreams and visions, angels and prophets, or God’s personal appearance. Instead he was to study and meditate on the Book of the Law and faithfully put it into practice. The fact that God’s main emphasis was on the Book of the Law—the Holy Scripture as developed thus far—did not mark the end of God’s special revelation through other means. When Joshua had been officially appointed as Moses’ assistant, God had indicated that he was going to be receiving special instructions through Eleazar the priest, who would inquire for him from the Urim (Num. 27:18-21). In other words, God was still going to speak through special revelation, but the emphasis had started shifting to the written word of God, and Joshua was to be totally committed to this written word.”

“God’s command, **Be strong and courageous**, already spoken by Moses to Israel (Deut. 31:6), appears [two] times here (Josh. 1:7,9). The expression is used before great undertakings like David’s charge to Solomon to build the temple (1 Chron. 28:20), King Hezekiah’s encouragement to his subjects to withstand the enemy’s siege (2 Chron. 32:7), and Joshua’s own charge to Israel to fight (Josh. 10:25).”

**Point 2:** God goes before His people to demonstrate His power (Josh. 3:5-8,14-17).

“As soon as the priests entered the water, its flow was blocked and the water **piled up in a heap** so that the people could cross on dry land (3:15-16). The same Hebrew words are used to describe the way the water piled when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea (Ex. 15:8). The river bed was now dry from **a town called Adam**, about thirty-two kilometers (twenty miles) north of Jericho, to the place where the Israelites stood. All the people could cross easily, just as their ancestors had crossed the Red Sea (Ex. 14:22). The priests who were carrying the ark of the covenant stopped and stood **in the middle of the Jordan** until all the people were safely across the river (3:17). No one was left behind.”
“When the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the Jordan River the waters ‘stood still, rising up’ and the people crossed over on dry ground. The fact that the Jordan River was at flood stage heightens the wonder of the miracle; even the downstream waters ceased to flow toward the Dead Sea. Not since the exodus (cp. Ex. 14:21-22) had Israel experienced such an awe-inspiring event of divine intervention. The similarity between this event and Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea could not have been lost upon the people, as a reminder of the Lord’s presence with, and purpose for, Israel.”

**Point 3: God calls His people to remember and testify to what He has done (Josh. 4:20-24).**

“Joshua emphasised that the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you (4:23). Only the hand of the Lord was powerful enough to have done something like this; no other power was capable of it (4:24). This deed trumpets the awesome power God has over all the earth and over all its peoples. The Israelites should, therefore, not treat God casually or disrespectfully but should always fear him (Ex. 14:31). Just as the crossing of the Red Sea caused the Egyptians to realise that God fights on behalf of his people, so the crossing of the Jordan would impress on all the people of the earth that the God of Israel is a mighty God. This point is confirmed in the very next verse, which reports that the Amorite kings ruling over the hill country and all the Canaanite kings ruling over the coastal regions were terrified when they heard how the Israelites had been able to cross the Jordan (5:1).”

“The acts of God demand that the glory be reserved for Him. Joshua gave credit for the miraculous crossing of the Jordan to God (Josh. 4:23). On a larger scale, the memorial stones were not merely a reminder of God’s faithfulness toward Israel. They provided testimony to other nations as well. God’s gracious acts toward His own people serve also as a testimony for those who have yet to acknowledge God: ‘This is so that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord’s hand is mighty’ (v. 24, HCSB). Through Joshua’s memorial stones, children of Israel could learn of God’s acts of deliverance. In a similar manner, the symbols and reminders of the Christian life serve as opportunities for us to teach our children, and the world, about our great God.”

References

1. Noël Piper, *Treasuring God in Our Traditions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 64.
In these sessions of The Gospel Project, we experience some of the most exciting narratives in Scripture. There are accounts here of sin and judgment, of moral decline and merciful intervention, and of rescuers who need rescue. Through it all, one thing is clear: God is with His people and He is faithful to His promise.

It’s important to keep that central theme in mind because many people read these stories about the conquest of the land and try to find examples for emulation. To be clear, we can learn a lot from these Old Testament heroes (see 1 Cor. 10), but we cannot implement their virtues apart from our connection to the Vine—Jesus Christ Himself, the One who bears fruit in us and through us.

As we walk through our present wilderness, struggling against sin and encountering sorrow, we know that the God who has gone before us is faithful. He is the One who prepares the way for us to be His ambassadors. He is the One who breaks the chains of our idolatry and lifts our gaze to His unchanging glory.