

Joshua Leads Courageously

Devotional Reading: [Daniel 10:18–21](#)

Background Scripture: [Exodus 19–24](#); [Deuteronomy 31:1–8](#); [34:1–12](#); [Joshua 1](#)

[Joshua 1:1–11](#)

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷ "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ 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."

¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

Key Text

"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](#)

Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 1: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

[Lessons 1–4](#)

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the vision of leadership that Joshua received from the Lord.
2. Explain parallels between the Lord's directives to Joshua and to Moses.
3. Write a definition of *courage* and make a plan to live courageously in the upcoming week.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Courage and Confidence
- B. Lesson Context

I. Commission (Joshua 1:1–6)

- A. Exhortation to Joshua (vv. 1–2)
- B. Extent of the Land (vv. 3–4)
- C. Encouragement to the People (vv. 5–6)

Daily Displays of Courage

II. Command (Joshua 1:7–9)

- A. Courage and Obedience (v. 7)
- B. Meditation and Obedience (v. 8)

The Risks of Rushing

- C. Courage and God's Presence (v. 9)

III. Crossing (Joshua 1:10–11)

- A. Ordering the Officers (v. 10)
- B. Preparing the People (v. 11)

Conclusion

- A. Courageously Committing to Obedience
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Canaan	<i>Kay-nun</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me</i>
Euphrates	<i>You-fray-teez</i>
Hittites	<i>Hit-ites</i> or <i>Hit-tites</i>
Midianites	<i>Mid-ee-un-ites</i>
Nun	<i>None</i>
Pentateuch	<i>Pen-ta-teuk</i>

Introduction

A. Courage and Confidence

A young family—a husband, wife, their three-year-old toddler, and their unborn son—left their hometown in northern Minnesota to move to a new city, sight unseen. Uncertainty abounded. Financial anxieties prompted the dramatic move. The parents were hopeful that a new environment would provide more opportunities. They left behind a well-established community of neighbors, coworkers, and friends from church, uncertain of finding a similar community in the new city. Feelings of despair were understandable, but the parents kept a flicker of hope alive.

Despite the parents' uncertainty, the family found a sense of community and support in their new city. Courage and confidence replaced uncertainty. The parents trusted that God would continue to provide for their needs.

Today's study introduces us to a group of people who were also on the move: the ancient Israelites. They were on the verge of entering the promised land after forty years of wilderness wanderings. Would Joshua, their leader, express uncertainty about the Lord's provision? Or would his courage strengthen the people as they moved?

B. Lesson Context

The Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years ([Exodus 12:40–41](#)). During this time, the descendants of Jacob became enslaved at the hands of the Egyptians. However, God redeemed his people and provided a way for them to leave captivity. Those who left Egypt did not go directly to the land that God promised to their ancestors. Instead, they stopped at Mount Sinai, where they received the law from God and constructed the tabernacle as the center of their worship ([Exodus 19–27](#)). But rather than obey God, the Israelites tested and disobeyed him ([Numbers 14:22](#)).

In the second year after leaving Egypt, the Israelites departed from Sinai and moved toward the southern edge of Canaan ([Numbers 10:11–12](#)). Moses sent twelve spies into the land ([13:17](#)), and after forty days, they returned ([13:25](#)). Ten spies demonstrated a lack of trust in God to lead them into Canaan. Only two spies, Joshua and Caleb, recommended entering the land ([14:6–9](#)). They trusted that God would be faithful to his promise that the people would possess it.

As a result of the lack of faith from the ten spies, God imposed punishment. First, the people had to spend forty years in the wilderness ([Numbers 14:34](#)). Second, out of the generation who left Egypt, only the two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb, lived to enter Canaan ([1:46](#); [2:32](#); [14:30](#)). This meant that Moses would not be a part of the generation allowed to enter the land ([14:22–23](#); [20:12](#)). Therefore, God and Moses established Joshua as Moses' successor to lead the people into Canaan ([27:15–23](#); [Deuteronomy 3:28](#); [31:7](#); [34:9](#)).

As the book of Joshua begins, nearly forty years have passed since the Israelites left Egypt. At this point, they were camped in the plains of Moab at the edge of Canaan, across the Jordan River from

Jericho ([Numbers 22:1](#); [33:48–50](#); [36:13](#)). Their presence in the area threatened local leaders ([22:2–3](#)). However, rather than obey the Lord and maintain holiness, some Israelites committed immoral acts and idolatry with the people of the land—an act that had deadly consequences ([Numbers 25](#)).

By the time Moses died, hundreds of years had passed since God first made promises to Abraham concerning the land. The people found themselves at a crucial juncture. They had yet to settle the land. Under the leadership of the newly commissioned Joshua, they needed to follow the Lord’s commands to possess the land that had been promised to them.

I. Commission ([Joshua 1:1–6](#))

A. Exhortation to Joshua (vv. [1–2](#))

1. After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide:

Moses dies at age 120 ([Deuteronomy 34:7](#)), and what follows takes place after that death. The name *Joshua* appears more than two dozen times in the Pentateuch, the designation for the first five books of the Old Testament. In ancient Hebrew, the name means “The Lord saves” or “The Lord is salvation.” Joshua is introduced in [Exodus 17:8–13](#) as a warrior. He is further identified as being the *son of Nun*, a descendent of Ephraim ([Numbers 13:8](#); [1 Chronicles 7:20, 27](#)).

The word translated as the noun *aide* is actually a verb in the Hebrew text. This fact highlights Joshua’s service to his elder and mentor. Joshua had done so since his youth (see [Numbers 11:28](#)). The designation also is found in [Exodus 24:13](#) and [33:11](#). The designation draws a parallel between Joshua’s service to Moses and Moses’ position as *the servant of the Lord*, although the Hebrew words translated “aide” and “servant” are different.

2. “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS.



Visual for [Lesson 1](#). Display this visual as you lead a conversation based on the discussion questions associated with [Joshua 1:7a](#).

The word of the Lord to Joshua affirms a change of leadership for the Israelites. *Moses is dead*, and now Joshua will become a leader who will speak for the Lord and guide the *people* of Israel into the land. Centuries earlier, God had promised Abram that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan ([Genesis 12:7](#); [15:8–13](#); [17:8](#)). God reiterated the same promise to his son and grandson as well ([26:3](#); [35:12](#)). Moses received the same promise when the Lord called him to lead the Israelites to “a land flowing with milk and honey” ([Exodus 3:8](#); compare [Leviticus 20:24](#); [Numbers 13:27](#); [Deuteronomy 31:20](#)). At the time of Moses’ death, the people had not yet taken any land west of the Jordan River. However, in a sense, the land had already been granted to them by the Lord, as it had been promised to their ancestors.

This crossing would have been relatively simple at the end of the dry season, as the *Jordan River* would be a quiet stream. However, it is now the end of the spring rainy season ([Joshua 4:19](#)). Heavy rains and melting snow have caused the Jordan to be in flood stage ([3:15](#); [4:18](#)). Despite these challenges, God will make the crossing possible. This miracle will validate Joshua’s leadership and demonstrate the people’s willingness to obey the Lord and take *the land* for themselves (see [Lesson 2](#)).

What Do You Think?

Have you ever had to follow in someone else's footsteps or take over a big responsibility? How did that feel?

Digging Deeper

In what ways will you prioritize being attentive to God's directives during seasons of transition?

B. Extent of the Land (vv. 3–4)

3. “I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

The Lord reiterates to Joshua the promises that he made to *Moses* regarding the land in [Deuteronomy 11:24](#). The Israelites do not yet possess the land, but to receive such a promise from the Lord is almost the same as holding the title deed to it. Although conflict and battles will occur ([Joshua 11:6–23](#); see [Lesson 3](#)), the victory ultimately belongs to the Lord and his people.

4. “Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

The description of the extent of the territory aligns with previous statements (see [Genesis 15:18–21](#); [Exodus 23:31](#); [Numbers 34:3–12](#); [Deuteronomy 1:7–8](#); [11:24](#)). The description begins in the southernmost region of the land (*the desert*) and extends to the northwest, where the mountains of *Lebanon* are located. To the northeast and east is the *Euphrates* River. This river lies more than 400 straight-line miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee. The northern area is summarized by the phrase *the Hittite country*. At the time of Joshua, in approximately the fourteenth century BC, the Hittites are a rising power. They controlled regions of what is now modern-day Turkey. The western boundary of the land is the *Mediterranean Sea*.

C. Encouragement to the People (vv. 5–6)

5. “No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

When God issues commands, he often follows them with supporting information that provides assurance. The Israelites will not acquire the land through their own strength. Instead, they will take possession of it solely because the Lord has granted it to them.

This instance is not the first time the Lord has promised his presence to Joshua (see [Deuteronomy 31:23](#)). By ensuring that no one will *be able to stand* in Joshua's way, the Lord guarantees the fulfillment of his promises and presents himself as a warrior fighting on behalf of his people.

Joshua has already experienced the realities of God's promise. During the final days of Moses, the Israelites captured sixty cities in the region east of Galilee ([Deuteronomy 3:4](#)). Additionally, the Israelites did not suffer any casualties in a previous battle with the Midianites ([Numbers 31:49](#)).

What Do You Think?

When was a time you felt that you needed a reminder that you were not forsaken by God? How did you grow spiritually in that time?

Digging Deeper

How will you encourage another believer by sharing the promise of God's steadfast presence (see [Matthew 28:20](#))?

Daily Displays of Courage

Jesse faced tremendous challenges throughout her life. She survived toxic and abusive relationships that lasted for years, enduring much pain and heartbreak. Despite it all, she displayed significant courage. Through a series of letters we exchanged, she taught me that courage arises from many small choices. She learned to trust God daily, maintain hope in his promises for redemption, and seek God's presence amid her challenges. Her letters revealed God's faithfulness and the courage that she found as a result.

Witnessing God's faithfulness to others has a way of humbling us and inspiring us to lead lives of courage. Joshua saw how the God who was with Moses would also be with him. Because of this, Joshua could take courage, knowing he would also experience God's presence, guidance, and direction.

The God who was with Joshua also promises his presence to us ([Matthew 28:20](#)). We can take courage from this promise, and our courage will testify to others of God's faithfulness and provision. How has witnessing the courage of others encouraged you to deepen your trust in the Lord?

—KS

6. “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

A form of the command *be strong and courageous* appears a total of eleven times in the Old Testament ([Deuteronomy 31:6–7, 23](#); [Joshua 1:6–7, 9, 18; 10:25](#); [1 Chronicles 22:13; 28:20](#); [2 Chronicles 32:7](#)).

Dictionaries offer several definitions of *courage*. A summary of them would be that courage is “the quality that enables one to meet danger and difficulties with firmness or valor, despite feelings of fear or inadequacy.” Joshua may have feelings of fear or inadequacy as he leads the people. His mentor, Moses, definitely felt inadequate ([Exodus 3:11](#)).

Even so, the Lord has chosen Joshua and given him a task to accomplish. The promise God *swore to their ancestors* is recorded in [Genesis 12:1–3; 15:18; 26:3; 28:13; 35:12](#).

II. Command ([Joshua 1:7–9](#))

A. Courage and Obedience (v. 7)

7a. “Be strong and very courageous.

The imperative *be strong and very courageous* is important enough to be repeated (see commentary on [Joshua 1:6](#), above). This command serves as the “marching order” for Joshua and the Israelites preparing to enter the land of Canaan. To be cowardly instead of courageous would reveal a lack of trust in God.

What Do You Think?

When you are prone to feeling fear or inadequacy, what promises of God give you courage?

Digging Deeper

Where in your life do you feel God is asking you to step out in courage right now?

7b. “Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Joshua will model courage and success by obeying *the law* the Lord gave the Israelites. The practices and promises offered by the pagan people who inhabit the land will be very enticing, as they already have been ([Numbers 25](#)). But Joshua must be determined not to go with them. His trust is not to be in a smorgasbord belief system—some of this and a little of that. He cannot swerve in any direction so as to taste what looks appealing.

As Joshua considers this requirement, perhaps he thinks of God’s command found in [Deuteronomy 28:14](#) (compare [5:32–33](#); [17:11](#), [20](#)). Joshua’s courageous leadership depends primarily on his willingness to obey the Lord. Before he can be a military leader of the people, he needs first to model spiritual leadership.

B. Meditation and Obedience (v. 8)

8. “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Joshua is to *keep* the law on his *lips* so that he can do three important things: reflect on it, obey it, and enjoy the blessings of obedience. Success in conquering the promised land depends on this ([Deuteronomy 29:9](#))!

Joshua will know the contents of the law by meditating on it *day and night*. As the newly appointed leader, he will need to make significant decisions throughout each day, but those decisions must be evaluated in light of what God has instructed. All hours of the day or night are good times to contemplate God’s ways and his Word (compare [Psalm 119:15](#), [23](#), [48](#), [78](#), [97](#), [99](#), [148](#)). By prioritizing these commands, Joshua and his leadership will experience blessings (compare [1:1–3](#)).

The words translated *prosperous* and *successful* each occur dozens of times in the Old Testament. But this is the only place where those two Hebrew words occur together. To be prosperous is not necessarily referring to financial success. Instead, it addresses the broader concept of “flourishing” (compare [2 Chronicles 14:7](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can you better prioritize the study of and reflection on God's Word in Scripture?

Digging Deeper

How can you incorporate new ways to reflect on God's Word in the early morning or late at night?

The Risks of Rushing

I worked for a commercial insurance provider, spending my days answering customers' billing questions. My computer screens were filled with programs that gave me a picture of their accounts. One particular program displayed the history of changes made to each account. When responding to questions, I would review this program and complete a series of calculations to respond promptly.

However, sometimes, I rushed the calculations and accidentally entered incorrect numbers or transposed the figures on the computer screen. More than once, this led to my giving the customer a wrong answer, much to their aggravation. In those cases, I usually identified the error if I slowed down and reviewed my calculations.

The Lord commanded Joshua to meditate on God's Word day and night. Joshua was not to rush through five minutes of morning devotions. He needed to realize that his number one task was to prioritize, reflect on, and obey God's Word.

Are your days too busy to reflect on God's Word in Scripture? You may need to slow down! In what ways can you (re)focus on God's Word throughout your daily activities?

—KS

C. Courage and God's Presence (v. 9)

9. "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."

The Lord reassures Joshua by posing a rhetorical question that should remove any doubt about the outcome. In this case, the Lord intends for the people's obedience to fulfill what he has planned for centuries: a provision of a particular land to Abraham and his descendants. The Lord would oversee the fulfillment of that promise himself.

This is the third time in this chapter that the Lord encourages Joshua to *be strong and courageous* as he assumes leadership of the people. Moses had given Joshua the same challenge when appointing him as successor ([Deuteronomy 31:7, 23](#)). While Joshua previously benefited from the support and wisdom of Moses, that era has now changed. Joshua is on his own—with the promises of God as his blessed assurance.

III. Crossing (Joshua 1:10–11)

A. Ordering the Officers (v. 10)

10. So Joshua ordered the officers of the people:

Joshua's preparatory commands to *the officers* demonstrate his trust in God and his willingness to begin entering the land. This group may include elders and administrative leaders (examples: [Numbers 11:16](#); [Deuteronomy 1:13–16](#); [29:10](#); [31:28](#)).

B. Preparing the People (v. 11)

11a. “Go through the camp and tell the people,

When the verse now before us is combined with the verse just before it, a threefold order of leadership for the Israelites is apparent: (1) The Lord directs Joshua; (2) Joshua gives commands to officers; and (3) the officers ensure that *the people* receive proper direction. In modern military parlance, this is called “the chain of command.” This will remind those in the army of Israel—potentially more than 600,000 soldiers ([Numbers 26:2, 51](#))—of who is in charge.

11b. “‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

As Joshua receives his marching orders from God, the Israelites are camped on the plains of Moab ([Numbers 26:3, 63](#)). That area is east of the *Jordan* River and just north of the Dead Sea. Historical hindsight tells us that their need to take food (*provisions*) is only a temporary, in-between step because of the coming shift from receiving manna to being able to eat from the produce of the land they are to enter ([Exodus 16:35](#); [Joshua 5:12](#)). When the people approached the land decades earlier, they had backed down (see Lesson Context). This time, however, is to be different.

What Do You Think?

What might it look like for you to spiritually prepare for what God is calling you to do next?

Digging Deeper

Who is an accountability partner or spiritual mentor who can offer support and wisdom during your preparation?

Conclusion

A. Courageously Committing to Obedience

For the young family described in the Introduction, the courageous trust of the parents paid off—I should know because it's the story of my parents. Because of their courage and trust in God, my older sibling and I could thrive. The situation of my parents and that of Joshua with the ancient Israelites is significantly different. However, both reveal tremendous human courage by trusting that God would provide.

We discern two points of application. First, God can and will use anyone as an instrument to achieve his will. Second, God promises to provide for us as we follow his lead. In neither case is worldly measures of success guaranteed. Instead, God promises eternal, spiritual blessings when we follow his will. Courage and trust are what Joshua was to exhibit. Will you exhibit the same in whatever role God has assigned you?

B. Prayer

Lord God, we want to be strong and courageous. Show us how to trust your will in all situations. Grant us peace in the uncertainty and in the waiting. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Be courageous as God leads you!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Write the following sentence on the board for class members to see as they arrive:

That took courage!

Distribute handouts (you create), each printed with a different news story describing an event that required a courageous response from an individual or group. At the beginning of class, divide participants into small groups and give each group one handout.

Direct group members to read the handout and ask a volunteer from each group to provide a one-minute summary to the whole class. After each volunteer has shared, lead a whole-class brainstorming session to discuss what made the individuals in the examples courageous.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "The individuals in these examples all demonstrated courage. In today's study, we'll review a passage of Scripture that illustrates courage and obedience to God."

Into the Word

Option. Distribute copies of the "Crossing Into Promise" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Read [Joshua 1:1–11](#) and invite learners to complete it individually in a minute or less before reviewing responses with a partner.

Split the class into two groups: **Compare the Call Group** and **Orders to Joshua Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following prompts or questions for in-group discussion based on [Joshua 1:1–11](#). Encourage the groups to use lesson resources, notes in a study Bible, or Internet sources to formulate their responses.

Compare the Call Group. 1—What are the key directives of God's call to Joshua? 2—In what ways is God's call of Joshua similar to God's call of Moses in [Exodus 3](#) and [Deuteronomy 11:8–32](#)? 3—In

what ways are the calls different?

Orders to Joshua Group. 1—Summarize the commands given to Joshua in [Joshua 1:1–11](#).
2—Summarize the resources, practices, and attitudes that Joshua needed to obey God successfully.
3—Summarize the results God promised would come to Joshua through his obedience.

Option. Display the map visual included in this quarter's *Adult Resources* packet, which you can purchase. Highlight the boundaries of the land God gave to the Israelites, and point out relevant locations on the map as you review the lessons from this quarter.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—Why did the Lord repeat the exhortation, “Be strong and courageous”? 2—Why was this a fitting exhortation for the task facing Joshua and the Israelites? 3—In what ways do the Lord's exhortations in [Joshua 1:7–9](#) fit the experiences of the Israelites? 4—What can we learn from this passage about how God works in the lives of those who serve him?

Into Life

Divide the class into groups of three and ask each group to develop a definition of the word *courage*. After three minutes, ask for a volunteer from each triad to share their group's definition. Write all the definitions on the board. Lead a group discussion to develop a singular definition of *courage* that considers all the definitions.

Write the following words on poster board, one word per board: *Work. Church. Family. Neighborhood. Health. Politics*. Place the posters around the classroom. Conclude class time by asking participants to consider each poster board and write on them ways to act courageously in the context written on the poster. Collect the posters and display them at the beginning of the next class time.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Spelling Out Courage” exercise from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs or small groups to complete as indicated.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(September 6—Joshua Leads Courageously\)](#)
