

... Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place...
(Mark 6:31)



STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

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

A number of times in the Old Testament, God spoke to his chosen people and called them to be strong and courageous.

He spoke these words to Joshua, as he called him to lead God's people into the promised land.
Through David, these words were spoken to Solomon,
as he prepared himself to build the temple and lead God's people.
Through King Hezekiah, at a time of national crisis, these words were spoken to the nation.

Each time, those words brought comfort and hope and truly encouraged people to step out in faith.
In the New Testament, we read those words less often, but we have the promise of Jesus,
that the power of the Holy Spirit would sweep over God's people.

This power, along with the continued promised presence of Jesus,
would give strength and courage to all who followed him.

Let us reflect on God's call to be courageous and strong,
in the face of whatever this new day, this new year, holds for us.

Let us hold firm to the source of this courage and strength: the ongoing presence of God himself!

Here is the video link if you would like to follow this on-line:- <https://youtu.be/hAnfQFgFXCQ>

Strong and Courageous

This is My command: be strong and courageous.
Never be afraid or discouraged because *I am* your God,
the Eternal One, *and I will* remain with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:6-9 (VOICE)

Call to Worship

The LORD is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy,
and with my song I praise him.
8 The LORD is the strength of his people,
a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.

Ps 27:7-8



Scripture

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

7 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Ps 46:1-3, 7

Prayer

O Lord, the nations are in uproar, mountains quake, and waters rise.
Floods and fire and fury shake the foundations of the world.
Hatred and prejudice seem to hold sway everywhere.
We turn to you, you are our strength and our refuge.
When all around is uncertain, our souls find rest in you.
When despair and anxiety threaten us, our souls find rest in you.
In you, we stand firm – you are our refuge and strength.
You, Lord Almighty, are with us; you, the God of Jacob, are our fortress.
Thank you, Lord.

Song Suggestion: How great is our God

Scripture

Moses: I'm now 120 years old. I'm not *physically* able to lead you anymore, and the Eternal has told me, "You're not going to cross the Jordan *River*." **3 Instead**, it will be the Eternal your God who leads you *across the Jordan...* *As my successor and the Eternal's representative*, Joshua will lead you across, just as He has said... **6 Be** strong and brave, and don't tremble in fear of them, because the Eternal your God is going with you. He'll never fail you or abandon you!

7 Then Moses spoke to Joshua, with all of Israel looking on.

Moses: Be strong and brave! You're going to lead these people into the land the Eternal promised their ancestors He'd give them... **8 And** He will be leading you. He'll be with you, and He'll never fail you or abandon you. So don't be afraid!

Deut 31:2-8 VOICE

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: **6** So be strong and courageous, for you will lead this people as they acquire and then divide the land I promised to their ancestors. **7** Always be strong and courageous, and always live by all of the law I gave to my servant Moses, never turning from it—even ever so slightly—so that you may succeed wherever you go. **8** Let *the words from* the book of the law be always on your lips. Meditate on them day and night so that you may be careful to live by all that is written in it. If you do, as you make your way *through this world*, you will prosper and always find success.

9 This is My command: be strong and courageous. Never be afraid or discouraged because *I am* your God, the Eternal One, *and I will* remain with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:6-9

Reflection

What a high calling and challenging commission! Moses, who had led the people out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to the very threshold of the promised land, would be going no further.

He had fulfilled his commission and done all that was required of him.

As the people stood before the threshold of a new era and a new land, Joshua, who had long ministered beside Moses, was chosen to lead the people forward. Joshua could not know all that would await him – but he could be sure there would be challenges and battles,

(both within the people and against the people), that would need to be faced.

There would be victories, and losses, and victories; sorrows and rejoicing; progress and retreat.

Joshua had seen Moses at work, had witnessed all the miracles, had experienced the power of God – and now it is his turn.

Of all the uncertainty and unknown territory before him, Joshua knew he could depend on one thing:

God, the Lord Almighty, would be with him and would never leave or abandon him.

He knew this to be true, because he had seen it before, with Moses in the wilderness.

We know it to be true: we have read the story.

Hundreds of years later, King David speaks the same message to his son, Solomon:

“Now, my son, the LORD be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the LORD your God, as he said you would... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged...”

“Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished. 1 Chron 22:11-13; 28:20

And many further years later, when the King of Assyria invaded Judah and threatened Jerusalem, King Hezekiah echoes these very words ...

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him.

With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles.”

And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said. 2 Chron 32:7-8

We stand at the threshold of a new year – with all its possibilities, challenges and uncertainties.

Every-one of us will face change in some way.

Every-one of us will face our own challenges and battles,

and we too will experience victories and losses, joys and sorrows.

In a world full of uncertainty and turbulence, we can be sure of one thing:

God is with us!

He has long proclaimed that he would never leave or forsake his people. Jesus declared exactly the same thing, shortly before he ascended into heaven:

“...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt 28:20

Pause a moment and reflect on your hopes, plans and expectations for the new year.

Think about the challenges you already know you may be facing. Acknowledge there will be challenges you can't even yet imagine.

Hear the voice of God as he says to you:

This is My command: be strong and courageous. Never be afraid or discouraged because I am your God, the Eternal One, and I will remain with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:6-9

*Reflect on what those words mean for you.
You might like to meditate on them, or offer them back to God as a prayer*

Silent Prayer

Scripture

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you... *Acts 1:8*

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed...

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4:8-13

Prayer

You, LORD, sit enthroned over the flood; you are enthroned as King forever.

You give strength to your people; and bless us with peace.

We come to you in repentance and rest and find salvation,
we come in quietness and trust and find strength.

LORD, be gracious to us; we long for you.
Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress.



*Strengthen our spirits, with the presence of your Spirit, that we may be strong.
Encourage our hearts, with the power of your Spirit, that we may be courageous.
(from Ps 29:10-11; Is 30:15; 33:2)*

Scripture

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.

Do everything in love.

1 Cor 16:13-14

Benediction

May God give you strength when you are weary and increase your power when you are weak.

May your strength be renewed as you hope in the LORD.

May you soar on wings like an eagle; may you run and not grow weary,
may you walk and not be faint. [Is 40:29-31](#)

At all times and in all ways, may you experience the strength and courage
that comes from the certain knowledge that the Lord Almighty,
the God of heaven and earth, is with you always.



GOING DEEPER:

Here are some suggestions that may help you to engage more deeply with this theme.

- **The Bible** is filled with stories of God calling his people to challenging, even terrifying, tasks and calling them to be strong and courageous. Some examples: the stories of Joshua, Solomon and Hezekiah mentioned above, Jesus walking on the water toward the disciples (Matthew 14:22-27), some of Paul's adventures (Acts 23:9-11; 27) and there are other stories as well.

Choose one such Bible passage and read it through slowly. Reflect on the circumstances around this story and what it tells you about God and about you. Think about what God might be saying to you in your circumstances through his words.

- **Reflect** on how you have needed to be strong and courageous in the past and where that strength and courage came from. Think about the circumstances and how you responded. What have you learnt about God and how has that impacted your relationship with him? Are you facing a situation now where you need to be strong and courageous? What is God saying to you about this?
- You could use one of the Bible passages or one of the songs provided in the material, or below, to practise **Lectio Divina**. (see page 8)
- **Visualise Scripture!** Choose a Bible passage which outlines how God gave his people strength and courage. (It may be helpful to use a concordance). Read it through slowly – all of it or some selected verses. Close your eyes and picture what is being described. What do you see, smell, hear? How is God revealing himself to you through this? How could you act out these verses? You could either record this experience in your journal or share it with someone.
- **Meditate** on a verse or passage of Scripture that speaks to you of God's strength. A concordance may also be helpful here.
- If you enjoy being **creative**, find some way to express your experiences of the strength and courage that comes from God – or how you imagine that to be. What does that look like for you? What does it feel like? How would you describe it to someone else? You can create a collage, or draw, paint, use clay, write a poem or compose a song. If you enjoy working with clay (or plasticine) take a piece of clay and knead it in your hands. As you feel it moving beneath your fingers, let it move into the shape of something that reminds you of the ways in which God gives us strength and courage.
- Go for a **walk**. As you walk, notice where you see God's strength around you, or people behaving courageously. Look around you...what do you see? Is there anything that challenges or inspires you to respond to his work in a different way?
- If you are **sharing** this retreat day with someone else, spend some time sharing your experiences. Pray together.
- If you like to **journal**, make a note of what you have experienced during this retreat time in your journal. A simple way to do this is to:

Thank God for Who He is and what He is doing in your life

Notice what is happening around you and in you

Respond to what God has shown you, by thanking Him, repenting, or recommitting yourself to Him

- **Simply sit in His presence**. We don't have to do anything to enjoy being in His presence! We are in His will when we are fully and completely in His presence, with our hearts focussed on Him.

EVEN DEEPER

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual practice from the Christian monastic tradition. Its title derives from the Latin words meaning reading and divine/holy. In Lectio Divina, we seek to experience the presence of God through reading and listening, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Lectio Divina can be practiced both by individuals and in groups.

Practicing Lectio Divina Individually

1. Text

Begin by choosing a section of Scripture that you would like to read and pray. You can choose the text randomly or use a liturgical book, such as The Book of Common Prayer. Try not to set a goal for how much content you will cover; the goal is to listen for God and to experience his presence.

2. Preparation

Do what you must to quiet and prepare yourself to hear from God. If you need to find a quiet room, sit in silence for several minutes, or sit in a comfortable chair, take whatever posture will help you prepare to receive and experience God's presence.

3. Reading/Listening

When you sense that your heart is prepared, begin by slowly reading the passage of Scripture that you have selected. Move slowly through sentences and phrases. As you read, pay attention to what word, phrase, or idea catches your attention.

4. Meditation

Begin to meditate on the word, phrase, or idea that has captured your attention. Repeat it again and again.

Consider:

What thoughts come to mind as you meditate on this word, phrase, or idea?

What are you reminded of in your life?

What does it make you hope for?

Meditation is no easy task—as you try to concentrate don't be disappointed if random thoughts enter your head. As they do, offer them to God.

5. Prayer

Now begin to speak to God. Tell God what word, phrase, or idea captured your attention and what came to mind as you meditated upon it. How is God using this word, phrase, or idea to bless and transform you? Tell God what you have been thinking and feeling as you've listened and meditated. Tell God how you hope this word, phrase, or idea will change your heart to be more like His.

6. Contemplation

Finish by focusing your attention on the fact that God's presence is with you. If as you try to focus on God's presence you sense a need to read the text again, to continue meditating, or to simply continue talking with God, allow yourself to do so. As you do, know that you are in the presence of God.

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN - Finding the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives as we review our day.

This is something that can be done throughout the day or at the end of the day. It helps us to become more aware of and focused on the presence of God in the midst of everyday life.

1. Recognize the presence of God

Be still and know that you are with God.

2. Look at your day with gratitude

Acknowledge God in the big and small things of life.

3. Review your day

When or where in the past 24 hours did you feel you were cooperating most fully with God's action in your life? When were you resisting?

Ask yourself

- What habits and life patterns do I notice?
- When did I feel most alive? Most drained of life?
- When did I have the greatest sense of belonging? When did I feel most alone?
- When did I give love? Where did I receive love?
- When did I feel most fully myself? Least myself?
- When did I feel most whole? Most fragmented?

4. Reconcile and Resolve

- Seek forgiveness
- Ask for direction
- Share a concern
- Express gratitude
- Resolve to move forward

Mars Hill Bible Church marshill.org/teaching/sp