



STRONG + COURAGEOUS

JOSHUA 1:9

A Themed Devotional Series

For CVM Professionals

By CVM Staff

This series of devotionals was created around CVM's annual theme of "Strong and Courageous" from Joshua 1:9. We hope you enjoy getting to know the CVM staff better while learning to find strength from God. We encourage you to prayerfully journey through the study with your Bibles open, looking up the *scriptures* (in italics) and contemplating the **questions** (in bold).

The devotionals are really just intended to be a jumping off point
to go deeper in God's Word.

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Strong and Courageous

More than Once

“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

We chose Joshua 1:9 and the words “Strong and Courageous” for this year’s theme for CVM. There were a number of good options, but this verse and phrase won the day. However, we could easily have chosen Joshua 1:6. Or Joshua 1:7. Why? Because they are all the same words.

In the first nine verses of Joshua, we find God telling Joshua three times to be “strong and courageous.” Joshua needed to hear these words more than once. I find that to be incredibly comforting. It’s one of the things I love about Scripture. When we read about our heroes and heroines in the Bible, they are incredibly...human. Sometimes, they are human to a painful point – they commit terrible sins, cover up egregious actions, fail in many ways. Yet, the Bible does not hide them – they are there for us to see, and to learn from. It’s one of the many reasons why I find the Bible to be so true. It doesn’t cover up for its heroes- it forgives them.

Back to Joshua – he did incredible things. His crowning moment was the leading of the community of Israel to the promised land – a promise that was 600 or so years in the making! Even the great leader of the exodus, Moses, did not cross into the promised land with Israel. This feat involved facing stronger people groups in fortified cities with a mish-mash band of Israelites which included other peoples who had joined the community upon leaving Egypt. Even though the land had already been promised and given by a God whom they had seen provide for them, Joshua and the people still had to walk into that promise. And to do so they received the reminder from God to be strong and courageous, more than once. There is a grace there, where God spoke into Joshua who he was to be, and that God “would be with them wherever they went.”

Another 800 years later in the book of Daniel, we find some of our Sunday School heroes. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are strong and courageous examples of faith. Yet, they also show a human side along with their hero side. By this point in history, Babylon was ruling over Israel. King Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image to be worshipped, yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow down to the idol. Nebuchadnezzar sentenced them to a fiery furnace for their deaths. Before they are thrown in, they have some final words for the king:

“Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O King, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue you have set up.” -Daniel 3:16-18

This is a courageous reply. But do you catch the subtle words that communicate a little uncertainty of what will happen next? “If our God is able...” and “But if not” – these are not strong words, and they are used more than once. This does not mean these three lost their faith in God entirely. But it does mean that they were – human.

Springing forward to the newer testament, we find the stories of our Lord. There is no greater example of how to walk our lives out on this earth than that of Jesus. Jesus being fully God, yet fully human, provides us with a model for love, for faith, and also for dealing with our own frailty at times. Jesus had the 12 disciples, who followed Him while He was on this earth. Near the end of Jesus’ life, as He knew the time was drawing near, He took the disciples to a garden in

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Gethsemane, and asked them to watch and pray with Him. It is a story that appears in all four Gospels. Matthew records the scene this way:

“He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’” -Matthew 26:37,38

We often spend time reflecting on Jesus’ divinity, but I’m not sure we spend as much time identifying with Jesus’ humanity. I feel hesitation to identify myself alongside of Jesus, but I do believe Jesus wanted to be an example of being human and how to do that well. Jesus loved well, honored God, lived without sin (we won’t accomplish that last one, but it’s helpful to see how Jesus deals with temptation without falling). Yet, in these verses above, Jesus’ actions here aren’t typically what we would refer to as ‘strong and courageous.’ He admits his struggles. He is vulnerable with his grief and anxiety. He finds some close friends to confide in and to share with. Maybe that is being strong and courageous.

The story goes on to show how the disciples are also human. They fall asleep on Jesus, more than once. Jesus returns to prayer and finds them asleep three times. I don’t wish to fast-forward through the climax of the entire Bible, but what happens in the aftermath of this story to Jesus Christ is the central point of, well I’d say human history. It is key to everything else. And these same disciples who failed Jesus go on to spread the good news of Jesus in all directions. More than once, these men and women were strong and courageous, to the point of death.

Let us also be strong and courageous, whatever that looks like for us. We may fail, more than once. Our heroes and heroines did too. God in His grace, reminds us who we are, and who He is. God will continue to be faithful and loving, much more than once.

- What does being ‘strong and courageous’ look like to you?
- What things do you find that God needs to show you more than once?
- What do you do with your doubts about your faith? Do you feel you can be honest about them? How do you get answers for some of your tougher questions?
- Do you look at the side of Jesus that was fully human? Is there a story about Jesus where his humanity stands out to you? How do you find this helpful?
- If you have a ‘garden of Gethsemane’ moment, do you have people you can talk to? Do you have a plan and people in place for when challenging times come?



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Courage To Say Yes and No

You have surely noticed by now that we have to answer a lot in life by saying either “yes” or “no. Those two words can mean the difference between life and death in some situations. They can either elevate you or get you torn down. Choosing one over the other may mean the difference in worldly success or failure.

Sometimes we look at those two choices and wonder what is the big deal? What difference does it really make if I choose one over the other? Who will it really hurt if I pick the wrong one?

It does make a difference in real life decisions. Picking the wrong one can cause harm to you and may cause harm to those around you. You have to be very cautious when you choose your words and make decisions.

I love scripture because there have been very few situations in my life where I have had to make a decision when there wasn't an example in scripture to guide me. I have tried to go through the Bible and review the situations of God's people and how they handled them. They all had Yes and No decisions to make. The ones I really love are the ones that involve young folks like Daniel.

Daniel was a young teenage man taken from his home into captivity and a new pagan culture. Right off the bat, he was asked to eat food offered to idols. Before he got to that point I'm sure the food situation for captives hadn't been good, and now he and his friends were being offered some first rate food from the king. I know when I have traveled in foreign lands and eaten the local food for a week, the first American food I could find, I devoured quickly. But Daniel politely asked to not eat the food sacrificed to idols and God blessed that decision. Daniel said No to Satan trying to defile him, and Yes to the Godly convictions that he was raised with.

What difference would it have made if he ate the food? Who would it have hurt? It would have hurt his relationship with the Lord and influenced others to do the same. He would have been disobedient, and as a leader, others might have followed his example. His actions affected him and others watching.

Years ago, I had a friend that was agnostic for the first many years of our friendship. Through a series of events she became a believer. Then one night at supper, she told me that she had watched me for years to see me fail so she could say that all Christians were just hypocrites. It was a blessing that she didn't stay around me 24/7 as I did fail at times, but by God's grace calling her, she was able to see me honor God in my walk.

Daniel had that influence on people. His friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego loved the Lord and said No to Nebuchadnezzar about bowing before an idol. Because they said Yes to God instead, they were thrown into a furnace to burn to death. They told the king that their God was able to save them, but even if He did not, they would still say Yes to Him.

Then, we find Daniel facing a decree that if he wanted to pray, it had to be to the king. The interesting thing here is that Daniel had a pattern. He prayed three times a day with his window open. He could have stopped praying, or stopped praying openly and shut his window so no one would see him. Instead, Daniel was proud of his God and not afraid of man. He kept his routine

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Courage To Say Yes and No

and what an encouragement it must have been to others. Then it became a testimony to everyone when the lions mouths were shut. WOW. Saying no to Satan and YES to God allows God to show who He is.

In the daily spiritual warfare that we encounter, we have to be strong and courageous to say No to Satan and YES to God. In the movie "God's Not Dead 2," there was a statement made, "I would rather obey God and be condemned by man, than obey man and be condemned by God." There is never a time or reason to not obey God!! Stand on His promises and learn from His people.

James 4:7-8 allows us to stand strong and courageous, "*Submit to God, resist Satan and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.*" Say NO to Satan and YES to God!

- What have you said No and Yes to lately, and what were the outcomes?
- Can you remember a time when you stood strong and saw the effects? Or maybe one where you didn't stand strong?
- What standards in society have become ungodly and immoral in your opinion?
- How can God use you as a person of character in your areas of influence, whether work, home, or church?



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Brave and Vulnerable

“Be Strong & Courageous. Do not be afraid: do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” –Joshua 1:9

“Do not be afraid” is written in the Bible 365 times. That is enough for a daily reminder from God to live fearlessly.

Sometimes, courage can be perceived as taking a big step or a huge undertaking. I recently heard someone refer to courage in the small things and I liked that. It took courage to apply to vet school. It takes courage to ask to pray for a staff member when we see them hurting, or even more courage to ask for prayer when we are hurting. It takes courage to stand up for our beliefs. For some, it takes courage to get out of bed and go to work when we are struggling. For others, it takes even more courage to face that client, that surgery, or that situation that has been super challenging in the past. But choosing courage over comfort can make a huge difference in our lives.

Writer Brené Brown says that Courage and Vulnerability go hand in hand. She shares:

1. If we’re going to be brave with our life, we must accept that we will fall, we will fail, we will know heartbreak. And that’s how we learn. That’s how we grow.

Her mantra each morning is this:

I’m going to live in the arena.

I’m going to be brave with my life.

I’m going to show up.

I’m going to take chances.

2. Vulnerability is not about winning. It’s not about losing. It’s about having the courage to show up when we can’t control the outcome. How brave we are can be measured by how vulnerable we are willing to be.

We all share a silent enemy bombarding us daily...trying to dictate our self-worth and that silent enemy is our minds. We are constantly second guessing ourselves, undermining real truth with “our truth,” believing what the world tells us we are instead of believing what God says we are.

The truth is NOT what we feel. Unfortunately, when we view ourselves differently than what we really are, it’s hard to even think of being strong & courageous. Once we can embrace the truth of what God created us to be, we can freely receive his strength and step into courageous living.

Here are some reminders of what God says you are:

- You are beautifully and wonderfully made Psalm 139:14
- You are made in God’s image Genesis 1:27
- You are accepted Romans 15:7
- You are free Galatians 5:1
- You can do all things through Jesus Christ Philippians 4:13
- You are God’s handiwork created to do good works Ephesians 2:10
- You are loved 1 Thessalonians 5:14
- You are complete in Christ Colossians 2:10

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- You are victorious
 - You are delivered from the power of darkness
 - You have the peace of God
 - You are strong in the Lord
 - You are free from condemnation
 - You have the mind of Christ
 - You have everlasting life
 - You are more than a conqueror
 - You are called of God
 - You are forgiven
- Revelations 21:7
Colossians 1:13
Philippians 4:7
Ephesians 6:10
Romans 8:1
1 Corinthians 2:16
John 6:47
Romans 8:37
2 Timothy 1:9
Ephesians 1:7

We, as human beings, are hard-wired to care about what people think of us. We need to learn to care about what God thinks of us. If we truly grasp that, it can be a game changer. We can make such an impact on this world. We can take chances and live courageously because we know who we are and Whose we are.

Know who you are & Whose you are. Knowing that God goes before you and that He is with you wherever you go is the key to how you can be Strong & Courageous!

- Think of one way you can take a step of courage today.
- Who do you allow to speak into your life and why?
- What scripture reference above can you stand on today?



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Strong Leadership

Do you consider yourself to be a leader?

Many of us would answer with a quick, emphatic, “NO!” When I was in grade school, I got selected to participate in a city-wide youth leadership campaign. A group of us got to miss a day of class (which was highly exciting) to tour the city government offices, meet the mayor, and sit in on a school board meeting. Even at that young age, I can remember thinking, “I will never be the mayor and I am certainly not a leader.”

Qualities of an excellent leader include casting vision, managing people, and inspiring creativity. These may be some traditional ideas of leadership we all hold. But I challenge you to consider this quote from John Maxwell, renowned leadership expert, “Leadership is influence.”

With that idea in mind, let’s think about the opening question again. I hope that by reflecting on God’s Word, you will be able to see that as followers of Jesus Christ, we are ALL called to be leaders. Even more so, like Joshua, we are instructed to be strong and courageous in this area of our lives because the LORD proclaims that He is always with us.

Joshua was born a slave in Egypt but selected by the LORD and commissioned by Moses to lead the Israelites into their Promised Land. Joshua’s life mirrors godly leadership. We can apply these traits to our circle of influence as well. Let’s look at 3 ways Joshua is remembered for being a strong leader. Contrast these character traits to the world’s view of a successful leader (fame, fortune, personal triumph). Joshua was filled with:

- ***Humble courage*** – Moses sent twelve spies to scout out the Promised Land God had set before them. Ten returned grumbling that the LORD had brought them this far only to let them fall victim to giants and strongly fortified cities. But Joshua and Caleb told of a land flowing with milk and honey. The two in the minority humbly exclaimed that the land was good and that the LORD would lead them into it. (Numbers 13 and 14)
- ***The spirit of bold prayers*** – In Joshua 10, the Israelites are in the midst of a fierce battle against an alliance of five enemy kings. Joshua turns toward God and boldly prays for the sun to stand still. The LORD listened and that day, “*the sun stood still in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day*” –Joshua 10:13. The tide of battle turned and the extra daylight helped the Israelites gain victory.
- ***A heart of worship*** – Near the end of his life, Joshua challenged his people to make a conscious choice to always serve God. He told the Israelites to “*hold fast to the LORD,*” - Joshua 23:8 and counseled them on importance of worshipping the one, true God; proclaiming that he and his house would worship the LORD.

We can mirror these three attributes when we apply the concept of “leadership is influence” to our world today. The ultimate authority of Jesus empowers us to “*prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*” -Ephesians 4:12. Our pastor, John Pryor, says it like this: “Pray, team up, and lead by example!”

- ***Courage*** - Being strong and courageous does not mean that we seek to fulfill our own ambitions and agenda. Philippians 2:3-4 tells us: “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*”

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Strong Leadership

- **Prayer** – We too, can lead others to approach the Lord with bold prayers. We can fight many battles for our friends and family on our knees.
 - *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”* -James 1:5-6
 - *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.”* -1 John 5:14-15
- **Worship** – As leaders, we demonstrate hearts of worship by rooting our identities in Christ. We are secure in this identity because *“we have not been given a spirit of fear but one of power, love and a sound mind.”* -1 Timothy 1:7. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are God’s workmanship. Sisters and brothers, we ARE significant to the LORD. When we approach God with freedom and confidence, we influence others to do the same.

As our ultimate leader, we look to King Jesus for our strength. His Great Commission states, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* -Matthew 28:18-20. He gives us the courage to lead others to Christ by His example, without fear.

- Who would you consider to be within your sphere of influence? Who might you be called to lead?
- What does humble courage look like in your workplace today today?
- As leaders, just like Jesus, we are ultimately servants. What are some creative ways you could serve hurting people in your community and show them the love of Christ?



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Memorial Stones

If there's one thing I know about you, it's that you're strong. You had the guts to choose veterinary medicine. You had the perseverance to endure the grueling science courses in undergrad. You survived vet school. And now, you're putting one foot in front of the other plodding through one of the most difficult professions. You have grit. You have determination. And you are stronger than many. I'd bet you're even courageous...

But, if that courage comes from knowing you're strong and capable, then it's easy to let fear and anxiety creep in when new challenges continue to test your strength. If our courage comes from our own power, we often doubt the future when things look daunting. Our courage, and strength, must come from God, or we are building on sinking sand instead of a firm foundation.

It's not always so simple to trust God though, we quickly slip back into relying on our own natural abilities. I think of the disciples, and how often they doubted Jesus' power even after they'd witnessed it before. Let me recap two chapters in Matthew. I know consecutive chapters aren't necessarily close in chronological time, but it makes it more relatable for us as readers to see the disciples forget Jesus' power right away.

So, in Matthew 14:15-21 (notably also in Mark 6, Luke 9, and John 6, the only miracle performed before His resurrection that was recorded in all 4 gospels!) Jesus is teaching 5,000 men, plus women and children, when their bellies start to rumble. The disciples, understandably, think it's time to dismiss the crowds to let them scrounge up some supper, but Jesus instead feeds them all from 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread. Pretty incredible miracle if you ask me, I think I'd be convinced of Jesus' almighty power by this point.

It's almost cute when in the very next chapter, 4,000 men, plus women and children, have become hungry listening to Jesus preach and the disciples are all, "*Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?*" –Matthew 15:33 and Mark 8:4. Uh, guys... Remember last chapter? Also, since then, remember how Jesus helped Peter walk on water? And how all the sick people who touched his cloak were healed? Or how he healed the demon-possessed daughter of the Canaanite woman without even going to her? All in less than 50 verses!

We're in good company when we forget God's faithfulness to us and lose courage, the disciples were no better.

In the book of Joshua, where our theme of Strong and Courageous comes from, God repeats a miracle as unbelievable as the feeding of thousands. You probably know the story, in Exodus 13, Moses and the Israelites flee Egypt after the series of plagues that convinced Pharaoh to let God's people go. You likely remember that Pharaoh changed his mind once again and chased after the Israelites cornering them into the Red Sea. And how could you forget that God then parted the Red Sea, allowing all His people, their livestock, and possessions to cross on dry land!

Then, because parting massive bodies of water is just a regular Tuesday for God, He does it again in Joshua 3. This time the whole nation of Israel and the Ark of the Covenant cross the River Jordan at flood levels. Although the text doesn't explicitly tell us, I'd guess there were also some naysayers in that group who didn't think God had a plan, who forgot about the crossing of the Red Sea, and still saw massive bodies of water as insurmountable obstacles to God.

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Memorial Stones

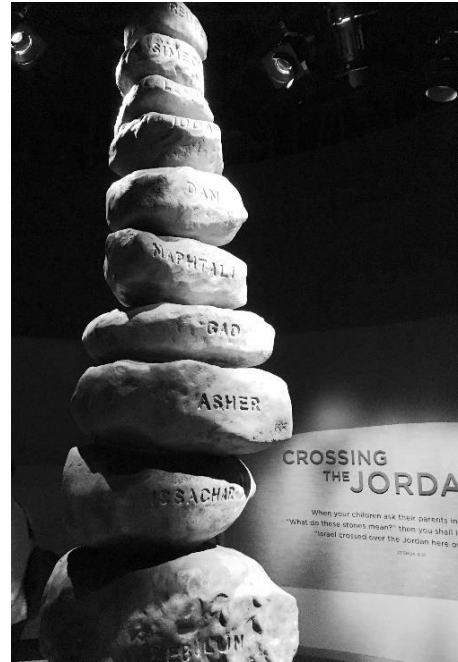
So, God had this great idea to help jog their memories in the future. He had one representative of each of the 12 tribes of Israel go back into the Jordan and pick up a stone to build a memorial.

“In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over.

He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.”

–Joshua 4:21-24

You see, we don’t have to fear man, or even nature, because we fear the Lord. (Remember, to fear the Lord means a reverent fear, to be filled with respect for, to be in awe of Him.) Our strength comes from the Lord, so we can be courageous in all situations remembering how His strength is sufficient and He is faithful.



- Where does your courage come from? Your own abilities, or honestly from faith in God’s power?
- What is a situation in your life right now you have been trying to handle in your own strength instead of trusting the Lord?
- When has God sustained you or provided for you in the past? What memorial stones do you need to build a monument of?
- Make a list of times when God came through for you like He did the Israelites and keep it somewhere close so you can refer to it when you might be tempted to lean on your own strength or understanding.



Dr. Lauren Charles is a graduate of Auburn, CVM, class of 2005. She grew up in Louisville, KY and returned there to practice in a small animal clinic for 3 years. Then for a year, she practiced in Baltimore working for Banfield, while planting a church. After a number of short-term mission trips to Latin American countries she lived and served in Bolivia from 2009-2012, working primarily with veterinary students. Lauren adopted her daughter Angie, and her dog Ruby in Bolivia, and then married her husband Jon. They now also have two sons, Isaiah and Paul. She serves as CVM’s Southeast U.S. Region Rep. Email: lcharles@cvm.org

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Wherever You Go

We had been walking all day, ten hours on what was supposed to be a half-day trek from one village to another to visit the village animal health workers whom we had trained several months before. I was exhausted as my two colleagues and I dropped down onto the one bench just outside the small tea shop in the center of the small village as the sunset and the cold started to settle in.

As a first year CVM fieldworker in Nepal, I was part of a team of nationals that trained one villager in each community to serve as the animal health worker. We then went to visit them to see how they were doing and encourage their communities to use their services. We had a great visit the previous day with one of our trainees and were here now to visit another young man from last winter's training named Chet. But Chet, it turned out, was not home. He had had an offer of a few days paid labor in another village and, in this poor community, he had understandably taken the opportunity. A message was sent and we hoped he would return the next day to meet with us.

Meanwhile, we had our own minor crisis on our hands. Chet's father was supposed to host us overnight in their home. But Chet's father had two wives in side by side homes and neither would take us in. We were tired, cold and hungry. We tried to buy a cup of tea and a boiled egg from the small shop, the only one in the village. But there were no eggs and there was no milk to make chai. My colleagues offered to pay more if someone would go buy some from a nearby farmer but there was none to go buy.

I looked up at a beautiful sky bursting with stars, not overwhelmed by artificial light since we were miles and miles from any electricity. While Chet's family argued about who would have to feed and house us, I, in my discouragement, began my own whining to God.

"Why are we here, Lord? These people don't want us. There is nothing to eat. The trainee isn't even here to meet us. We can't do any good here when no one even wants us to come in the first place!"

I clearly heard from God that evening that it wasn't about knowing the why. It was about knowing that I was where God wanted me right then.

I learned a lot during our stay in that village.

I learned that this was the poorest village I had ever seen. They truly had no milk and no eggs. Apparently, it had once been a prosperous village with lush green rice fields along the stream that ran through town. A few years before, a massive flood came. All of the fertile top soil was washed away, leaving a rock-strewn gravel valley. For several years now, nothing had been able to grow near the stream. On the steep, dry, hillsides surrounding the village, some corn could be grown which was made into alcohol. All the dreams and future of the village had been washed down the river. Desperate, hungry farmers turned to alcohol in their despair.

I learned that it is culturally important to serve rice to a visitor. Anything else is considered an insult. It wasn't that these two households didn't WANT to host us, but they didn't want to insult us. Neither had any rice whatsoever nor anywhere to get any. They themselves ate the food of the extremely poor, a paste called "dido" made from millet that tasted like playdough.

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Eventually, one family took us in, fed us dido in spite of their shame, and allowed us to spend the night while we waited for Chet, who did return the next day.

Were there any seeds of hope for the gospel planted from our visit? Do I need to know? I learned that God only needs me to trust Him. Once I have done that, I have no reason to be discouraged. The Lord our God is with us, wherever we go.

- Think of a time when you were discouraged. If it was a time when you thought you were following God yet didn't get the results you expected, what did you say to God about that?
- When is it hardest to trust God?
- What does it look like to be encouraged rather than discouraged in tough times?



Dr. Karen Stoufer grew up in California, attended veterinary college at Cornell University and practiced in small animal clinics in Buffalo, New York and the California Bay Area, including having her own house call practice until she and her family went to Nepal with CVM in 1990. In 2003 she returned to work in the CVM Seattle Office where she serves as the Asia Regional Director. She & her husband have two biological daughters raised in Nepal and three former foster daughters from Nepal raised in America. Interests include their two grandchildren, third culture kids, refugees, Guide Dogs and camping. Email: kstoufer@cvm.org

Strong and Courageous

Not Weak and Broken

In the remotes of Nepal lived a farmer by the name of Devilal. He had recently become a Christian which sparked an outrage in his village neighbors. The villagers feared what was to come. They knew their local deities would punish them for allowing Devilal to live. And the villagers let Devilal know of their intentions. Such is the beginning to an incredible testimony of being Strong and Courageous. The rest of the story is nothing short of miracles, transformed lives and God's love poured out. But such stories, though they encourage us, seem almost surreal because few of us have experienced such threats. Do such testimonies then minimize our need to be Strong and Courageous? Is God's call and provision to be Strong and Courageous only for a "Daniel in the lion's den" experience?

To unfold these questions I want to share another Strong and Courageous story with you. One that I think relates more to our daily callings. The heroine of our story is a relatively new veterinary graduate who I met at a recent CVM training. Strong and Courageous? In her humility, she would not label herself as such, probably "weak and broken" would be her conclusion. No Lions' Den or Fiery Furnace but she lived out her faith and trust in Christ in an inhospitable veterinary clinic. She had been humiliated, persecuted, and put down. In listening to her story, her maturity and heart for Christ was evident even amongst her yet unresolved pain and sadness. Her temptation was to crumble and flee, but her desire was to trust and obey. Her witness was God's empowering her to hold fast and love, especially loving those who were purposefully hurting her. Your own personal Strong and Courageous moments may have different venues and sets of actors but I think you can still relate to our heroine's story – I know I can! I also believe that ALL our Strong and Courageous moments (no matter how "trivial" we might label them) call for the same level of resolve that Daniel, Joshua, and other Bible "heroes" lived out. But what enables us to muster that kind of resolve? What enables us to go from crumbling and fleeing temptation to a holding fast with a loving witness?

I believe there are two factors that allow anyone (both Christians and non-Christians) to *seem* Strong and Courageous:

1. A belief that one has the upper hand (a confidence in resources).
2. A belief that one is part of a cause more worthy than self (not necessarily a good cause).

Is there a difference though between a Christian and a non-Christian being Strong and Courageous?

I think the first and foremost difference is an identity factor – whose are we? As Christians, we are children of God. Family of origin can make all the difference. Yes, we may have compromised, even devastated earthly families but our new identity in Christ comes with some incredible promises – the question is; do we really believe that those promises are for us? Do you believe? The Bible states that our new identity in Christ should radically change our inner beliefs. Moreover, living out those beliefs should radically change our thoughts and behavior. The Apostle Paul's prayer for the church was that through the power of God's grace and His Spirit we would be strengthened to experience Christ's dwelling in our hearts. The transformation that comes from Christ's dwelling affirms our being a privileged member of God's family and builds a confidence knowing we are not alone, we have all the resources

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needed (even when it doesn't seem so) and we have a cause greater than ourselves. What is that cause? I believe the answer is in the Apostle Paul's prayer.

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

-Ephesians 3:16-19 NIV

I believe that the cause is love, more specifically Christ's love. Christ's love makes all the difference in being Strong and Courageous. It is so radically different from what the world knows or understands. It is a love that points to God and desires what He desires. It is a love that enables us to willingly sacrifice ourselves for others, even our enemies. It is a love that so desires others to be wonderfully saved and for God to be glorified that our fears are corralled into an appropriate perspective. It is a love that enables us to *"be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"* so that we can be Strong and Courageous even when we feel weak and broken! A bit daunting? God's promise to us is that He will do immeasurably more than we can imagine or ask – so let's keep imagining and asking and then watch what God does!

- What are some recent or present challenges in your life where you desire to be Strong and Courageous?
- What are some temptations that counter God's promises for you to be Strong and Courageous? How do you work through those temptations? What temptations are you struggling with to overcome? How can others help you find victory in those temptations?
- What are other ways that God helps you be Strong and Courageous?
- How will you put into practice what you have learned from this devotion?



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Strong and Courageous

Courage in the Face of Power

“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

Can I tell you something disappointing? *“Be strong and courageous... for God will be with you,”* –Joshua 1:9, was not written to me. Compared to most of our planet’s inhabitants, I have great wealth, education, freedom, and power. (You probably do too.) Outside of a shared belief in the almighty God, I bear very little resemblance to the ancient Israelites in the book of Joshua. Folks like me have more in common with the Canaanites who were overrun by God’s people.

I grew up in the religious, ethnic, gender, and economic majority and I often sensed an arrogant belief that our place in society was tied to our virtue. I’ve come to realize, however, that communal self-righteousness is the blinders we wear so we can maintain our social status. Wealthy educated people are actually in the global minority and, when I take off the blinders, I see many perspectives that are underrepresented in my core community. I face the moral choice of whether to disregard those other perspectives or to acknowledge that I may have grown up on the less righteous side of history. Wealth comes at great cost, the privilege of power relies on the presence of the powerless, and freedom too often is carried on the backs of slaves.

So let’s read this passage from Joshua with a more accurate context. For hundreds of years the Hebrew people were a society of slaves serving the most prosperous empire in the region. Then through a miraculous liberation, they found themselves marooned in a desert for an entire generation. They entered a new covenant with their God at Sinai and received an extensive new code of conduct. Their one-god-above-all-others worldview was an absurd minority among ancient Middle Eastern societies, and the Hebrews themselves were a bit foggy on the details of their faith.

This foreign, nomadic minority people group had no strength, no power, and no wealth. What they did have was sheer desperation and the promise of an undomesticated God they were just getting to know. When Joshua told God’s people to be strong and courageous, he wasn’t instructing them to muster up their bravery for the coming difficulties. He was telling them to remember who fights for them—remember to whom they belong—and trust in God’s strength. Their first battle in Joshua 6 wasn’t a Braveheart-style charge into enemy lines. It was a battle won with defiant marching, singing, and shouting.

In the kingdom of God, strength and courage have little to do with swords, arrows, or rifles. Strength and courage in scripture equate to humility and trusting that God is good.

Consider that before Joshua led the Israelites to Jericho, he sent two spies to scope out the fortress. Their cover was compromised while spending the night at a prostitute’s house (which seems pretty sketchy), and it was the prostitute Rahab herself who saved the Israelites. She did this, not by toeing the Jericho line, but by lying to the authorities and hiding the spies on her roof. A seditious prostitute helps Israelite spies hide and run away. Is this a model of strength and courage? Yet the Israelites were saved thanks to Rahab’s subversion and she, in turn, was delivered from the destruction of Jericho. And generations later God extended deliverance to all people when Jesus was born from the line of Rahab.

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Courage in the Face of Power

Many people in today's world find themselves in a situation similar to the Joshua 1 Israelites. They have no power, no wealth, and no voice. Powerful nations and communities are militantly working to keep them out or keep them silent. This is neither my personal reality, nor the experience of the people closest to me. I was born into relative power and prosperity, and I find myself in Canaan, watching the Israelites dance across the river that separates us.

So what does Joshua 1 mean to you and me? It means we should have the strength and courage to humble ourselves and act compassionately on behalf of others. It means shutting our mouths and opening our minds to listen. It means we have the courage to recognize the deep-seated injustices around us and choose to side with powerless social minorities. I don't have all the answers on how best to do this, but I invite you to join me on the journey. We can begin by recognizing the oppressed, looking them in the eyes, listening to them, and weeping together. Then let's gather up our courage and do everything in our power to pursue righteousness with them. By God's grace, we just might find ourselves in the line of Rahab.

- Contemplate the depth of brokenness in the world around you: physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. What do you feel in response to this brokenness? How does your cultural context influence this brokenness for better and for worse?
- What groups of people have little power or influence in your local community, region, nation, and world? What do you not know about these groups? Where can you read or hear first-hand perspectives from people in these groups?
- Where does your economic status, education, ethnicity, gender, and religion place you relative to others in your society?
- In what ways are you uniquely equipped to serve others, both near and far?



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Strong and Courageous

Fan the Right Flame

Ever heard this? You're about to depart and a well-wisher says, "Be safe!" They mean well. They mean they care. It's really the same as Goodbye, or Farewell. I'm glad they care. But I confess, I always wonder: where in the Bible does it command us to be safe?

When Paul wrote Timothy, he wrote from prison, about to die; yet he was joyful, prayerful, bold. He encouraged young Timothy not to fear, not to be timid:

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." - 2 Timothy 1:7

We all fear. Sin has separated us from God and left us broken. We search for identity, for the meaning of our existence in a million ways, in a career, in power, in possessions, in entertainment, in how we dress. Some may seem to satisfy for a short time; but in the end, all fall short. God has put eternity in our hearts. Only He is big enough to satisfy. Nothing else will do it. Only if we know who we are in Christ! Only by faith.

Paul knew who he was in Christ. Saved. Called to a holy life, because of His purpose and grace. Grace given through Jesus before the beginning of time!

"[Jesus] shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." - Hebrews 2:14-15

Death destroyed, but Jesus has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. Paul is unashamed, because he knows who he has trusted, and that He is able to guard what he has entrusted to Him.

"For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God..." - Timothy 1:6

Several times when it appeared that I was about to die in Africa—God gave the grace to laugh. It was not hysteria. It was not bravery. My confidence is not in me—that I will not fear; my confidence is in Him. He always gives sufficient grace. But right now, before the crisis, train! Fan the right flame!

A woman delivered Bibles to believers, and encouraged secret discipleship groups in a land where believers were put in prison and tortured for their faith. She made a deal with God. She said, "God, you know I am timid and fearful. You know that if I go to prison, I will not be strong enough—I'll give up my faith. So I will keep doing Your work, but you have to keep me from being caught."

Such a deal! For years, she encouraged believers—sometimes escaping arrest by climbing out the back window—many times she had narrow escapes. Then it happened.

She was arrested. All the way to her cold, dark, frightening cell, she argued with God. "You're making a mistake! I am not strong enough for this!"

At midnight, she was called into the interrogation room, a small, timid, frightened creature. But as she stood in the intimidating bright lights before the interrogator surrounded by soldiers

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ready to rape and beat her—something happened. It was like she became a different person. She grew bold. She started preaching. She didn't even recognize herself.

Before the interrogator could lash out with another question, she began telling him about the Lord, and how God created him, and how he would answer to Him in the judgement. She boldly proclaimed the Truth, and told him that he must be born again.

Finally, the interrogator ordered her back to her cell. He was worn out! This happened night after night. Until one night, he himself came to her cell and asked her to help him become a believer too.

It wasn't her self-induced courage; it was God's power, God's love.

"On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" –Matthew 10:18-20

Before the test, she had trained herself to be godly, instead of living in a spirit of fear. She had power, love, and self-discipline: all supplied by the Holy Spirit. Fan the flame of faith!

Fear in the Greek means timidity, cowardice, not phobia. It's the opposite of faith. Power refers to new life in Christ. Power so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. Power to grasp the unfathomable love of Christ. Love casts out fear. Strap on the armor of God: salvation, righteousness, truth, faith, preparation in the Word, prayer (Ephesians 6:10-18). Train yourselves to be godly.

- What would be an alternative to "Be Safe" that would encourage us to fan the flame of faith? Maybe, "Be faithful!" "Be strong and courageous!"
- To fan the flame, means to "keep at full flame." Which flame are you fanning? Fear? Or His gift of faith?
- What could your next steps be to fan the right flame?



One month after vet school graduation (WSU, 1983), Fred Van Gorkom went to Ethiopia with Christian Veterinary Mission. While working in veterinary projects, famine relief, refugee and discipleship ministries he met Vicki, also a veterinarian (OSU, 1982). They married in 1986, returning immediately to remote southwestern Ethiopia where they raised their four children while doing community development and church planting. In 2008, they moved to CVM Seattle where they both serve to help mobilize others for the privilege of international missions. Email: fvangorkom@cvm.org

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Climbing the Wall

Recently, I have been thinking a lot about walls. I watched a movie called *The Dawn Wall* and listened to the audio biography of Tommy Caldwell – the climber who spent parts of 6 years exploring and studying the Dawn Wall, so named because it is the tallest, smoothest granite wall in Yosemite National Park. In his final push in 2015, he spent 19 days continuously on the wall free climbing it with his climbing partner Kevin Jorgeson. In this pursuit, they exhibited strength, courage, and wisdom, although some might argue it was more foolhardiness.

The past 6 months, our family has joined a bouldering gym and I have been climbing walls as well. Very much smaller, but for me sometimes they feel as tall as the Dawn Wall. Not all walls are physical – last year in June I was working part time, homeschooling my kids in Grades 10 and 12, involved with groups, church committees and friends. Then over the summer, I quit, or took a leave from, every one of those and prepared to drive across Canada to Kelowna BC. where my husband was doing a 10-month sabbatical stint. Arriving there, we set up a new unfurnished rental house, found a new church, helped my kids find jobs, enrolled one in high school, found a women's group, a Bible study, a hiking group, and new friends, and generally resettled. Wouldn't you agree that most people would consider that a wall of sorts too?

I had to trust God for all these new things, and that our sons would adjust to school, find jobs, they would fit in, and find friends. But, Jeremiah 29:11 says, *“for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you a future and a hope.”*

Joshua also faced walls - the walls of Jericho. He wasn't climbing them but preparing for them to be breached and knocked down. You can read about that in Joshua 6. Many times God told Joshua – *“be strong and courageous”* - five times in the book of Joshua and through the voice of Moses. And why? I believe it is because of the promise that follows that command - *“for the Lord your God will go with you”* and *“Joshua would lead the people to inherit the land that God had given them.”*

So back to tips for climbing (or knocking down walls)

1) It takes **Strength**, but not just physical strength. It takes the strength that comes from trusting in God. Joshua was a warrior, a fighter, and a spy. He had physical strength, but that alone wouldn't be enough for him to complete the task. He needed the strength that comes from God's promises, the promises that God would go with him and would lead him.

2) It takes **Courage**. Joshua needed courage to follow God's instructions - here he was, a young man who had been following in the footsteps of Moses, but Moses wasn't allowed to cross over into the Promised Land, and now Joshua was the one who had to take charge of this great band of sometimes unruly, disobedient, and complaining Israelites. That required courage to step up, as well as the need to trust in God for guidance.

3) It is a **Step-By-Step** process. Joshua had to take that first step to walk around the walls of Jericho. He had to know that each step in that daily lap, and finally seven-lap circuit, around the massive walls of Jericho were leading to the completion of God's promise. Psalm 85:13 tells us, *“Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.”*

For myself, I believe that God has prepared me for my role with CVM Canada step-by-step. I had previously been a CVF student many years ago. For a long time, I connected with CVM at

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conferences, but then I went on my first short-term mission trip in 2014 and over the next 6 years went on 6 trips, led a trip, and joined the CVM Canada Advisory Board. As I look back, I was being prepared step-by-step for the role that God had in mind for me.

4) Through all of this, I learned it also takes **Wisdom**. Joshua had to trust in God that God's instructions were right. It didn't make sense to march around the city of Jericho and then blow the trumpets, but the key here was that the Ark of the Covenant of God, and God himself, were going with them.

Sometimes, when you are climbing a mountain, bends in the trail hide the summit from sight. You think you are getting to the top, but around the next bend the trail keeps going on ahead of you.

As I was becoming more involved with the leadership of CVM Canada, all of a sudden the trail got very steep. The enormity of the task started revealing itself. That's when you know that you definitely can't do this on your own. This is God's work and it is God's plan. I also need wisdom. Like Solomon building the temple, he realized that he needed wisdom to complete God's work, and God promised this through David: David also said to Solomon his son, *"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 Chronicles 28:20. Applying that perspective to the work of CVM in Canada brings a great relief. It doesn't depend on me to fulfill the mission of CVM Canada. It is up to God to prepare the hearts of people, challenge them to get involved, and use their skills. I pray that He uses me to encourage this work.

Join in the work that God has for you and be strong and courageous as you approach what might seem to be big walls. Even the mighty walls of Jericho fell in the presence of the Lord.

- Consider the walls that you may be facing right now – are they relational, financial, or career walls?
- How are you currently tackling them? Are you relying on your own strength and courage, or depending on God for the strength and courage to climb them?
- Will you commit to study 1 Chronicles 28:20 this week and consider the lessons from there about not being afraid or discouraged and depending on God.



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Next Steps

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” -Joshua 1:9

What do you think God is asking of you? Do you have a sense of His leading in the “next steps” for your journey into the promised land? His Spirit is speaking to us. His word calls to us. Others in the body of Christ inspire and motivate us. Yet we often seem frozen in our spiritual tracks. He wants us to be strong and courageous and to move forward. As we do, He uses our testimony to lead and empower others. We, however, are filled with doubt, questions, or a sense of inadequacy. We can also be caught up in the cares of the world and are not even in a place to be able to hear. Other times, we want to be obedient but then begin to compare ourselves to others and question if we truly are of value to Him. We ask ourselves, can God really use me?

These verses in Joshua have been very important in my own faith journey. They also continue to be important as I move into the “promised land” that He has before me. I have seen His faithfulness and can clearly remember times of obedience and victory. I can also clearly remember times of failure and loss. He is faithful to challenge me. He calls me to be strong and courageous and to use the memories of my own journey as well as the testimony of others to put me in a place of taking a “next step”.

“Now it came about after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses’ servant” -Joshua 1:1. Joshua is charged by the Lord to take a next step. A big next step for sure. “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people to the land I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.” -Joshua 1:2

I can only imagine the multitude of questions that flooded Joshua’s mind as he heard the Lord speak to him. He had an amazing track record of serving Moses and seeing God at work in miraculous ways. He had clearly demonstrated his gifts as a leader, and was selected to be in this very place of leadership. God then renewed His calling knowing that some big “next steps” were ahead. Read the first nine verses of Joshua, hear the charge of the Lord.

- Given every place on which the sole of his foot treads. (verse 3)
- Given a large country with clear boundaries. (verse 4)
- No man would stand before him all the days of his life. (verse 5)
- God would be with Joshua as He had been with Moses. (verse 5)
- Twice he is charged to be strong and courageous. (verse 6 & 7)
- And he is charged to be careful to do according to the law of Moses. (verse 7 & 8)
- Knowing and following God’s law will be prosperity and success. (verse 8)
- And then finally again a charge to be strong and courageous. (verse 9)

The book of Joshua indicates that Joshua took action and took a next step. We, like him, have the promises of God’s word and the work of His Spirit and the body of Christ to charge us to “Be strong and courageous” in taking the next steps He is asking of us.

I find it interesting that Joshua 1:9 was the global favorite for the “You Version” Bible app in 2017. It continued into 2018 as the most popular in South America and countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Turkey, and Vietnam.

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(<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/december/most-popular-bible-verse-2018-youversion-app-bible-gateway.html>). We need these verses to stir us into the next steps of our faith.

God is speaking to us in much the same way as He did to Joshua. We are each charged to cross into the promised land of a redeemed life. We know there is a battle ahead of us. The land is full of enemies. Our faith journey requires what we recognize His call of leadership and hear from God afresh to be reminded of the foundation of His word, the importance of the work, and presence of His Spirit. He wants to remind us as He did Joshua that we are to be strong and courageous. He wants us to claim each area of our lives as redeemed by His completed work on the cross. He wants us to live in the fullness of all of the inheritance we have from Him. He wants us to take a next step...

- What area of your life is He speaking to you about? How is He charging you to be strong and courageous?
- Is His word the center of your efforts to prepare to advance into the promised land He has for you?
- What are the next steps He is asking you to take on this journey? Remember He is telling you to be strong and courageous.



Kit is a 1978 graduate of Colorado State University. He served as a veterinarian in the US Air Force and in private practice in Panama City, FL before going with his wife Jan and daughters, Molly and Missy, to serve with CVM in Kenya from 1985-1990. Kit then returned to Seattle to serve in the CVM home office and has served as the Executive Director since 1993. He and Jan are the proud grandparents to seven grandchildren and are blessed to walk their calling out in the CVM family. Email: kflowers@cvm.org

Strong and Courageous

Thankful for the Scars

“Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” –Ephesians 3:20

It's our redemptive story

Life is full of challenges. Without God it can be frightening. With God we still experience challenges, but through our faith, they become great adventures that bare witness to the very heart of God. And it is a redemptive story God uses to draw people, communities, even nations towards Himself.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.” - Romans 8:16-17

Called by a promise

In the book of Joshua, we are introduced to the prostitute Rahab, who because of her sin is forced to live on the fringe of society. But by the Grace of God, the scars of sin no longer defined her identity, and through faith, courage, and obedience to God, she was not only spared, but inherited a remarkable place in history that continues to encourage multitudes of others through her redemptive story.

“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.” –Hebrews 11:31

Scars left from sin and struggles become our personal testament that the power and strength of His Holy Spirit deliver, heal, and transform our lives. The wounds and pain that can overwhelm us begin to mend, and our new identity in Jesus Christ offers redemption, allowing our scars to be a witness that when shared, bring encouragement of God's constant transformation and healing.

Thankful for the scars

We were created by God as His masterpiece to do wonderful things through the salvation we receive by believing in Jesus. As children of God, we are a people of promise given the fullest measure of our Savior's power and strength through His Holy Spirit. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1:19-20 that this power is like the working of His mighty strength – the same strength that God used to raise Jesus from His grave.

“...and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...” –Ephesians 1:19-20

The Power of God

Romans 1:20 tells us that God's power and divine nature are eternal. They are working within us, just as they were in the beginning, and the power of the Gospel will remain until the end of

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time. It can part seas, raise the dead, and through our faith in Jesus Christ, transform lives by the power of His love.

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” –Ephesians 2:10

Before His ascension, Jesus displayed His scars as evidence of healing, salvation, and reconciliation between the sin of the world and our Heavenly Father. By picking up the cross of salvation, we are adopted into His Kingdom, and with strength and courage we can live our lives as a living sacrifice that encourages others to faithfully pick up the cross and be a witness for the Glory of God wherever we are called.

- What does it mean to be called a child of God?
- Why is Rahab’s story significant to our biblical understanding of scars? How does this differ from society’s view of scars?
- How do you define your identity? How does God describe your identity?
- Discuss and give examples of how our identity impacts others.
- When do we receive the strength and power of God? Is it available for everyone?
- How is God calling you to be a witness, maybe even through the story of your scars?

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” -Joshua 1:9



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