

When Life Intimidates Us

Intro: Life can be intimidating; and nothing intimidates us like the uncertainty of the future. No matter where we are in life, we can see many potential problems facing us. When we are young we may be intimidated by the evil world in which we raise our kids and we are afraid they might not turn out, when we are mid-aged we are intimidated by the challenges of caring for parents and we are afraid that we might not be able to provide the care they need, when we are old we are intimidated by the prospects of debilitating disease and we are afraid that we will be a burden to others.

What do we do with these fears and a dozen others that we face? What do we do when we cannot see our way to success in the face of mounting problems? For an answer let's turn to Joshua chapter one.

If there was ever a person to feel intimidated by his future it was Joshua. In Joshua chapter one we see him trembling on the east side of the Jordan, fully aware of the awesome charge he is about to inherit. For forty years he had been a co-worker and colleague of the great leader Moses. He had seen first hand the challenges of leading the Israelite people. He could remember the rebellion of forty years ago when they came to this same place and the plan to enter Canaan was stopped by a murmuring and faithless people. He had seen his generation die in the wilderness. Over those years He had seen the Israelites get to Moses and cause him in a fit of frustration to dishonor the Lord and miss the opportunity to go with God's people into the Promised Land.

And he could look ahead and see great challenges. He was about to take charge of these same people and he would have to lead them in combat against the strong fortified cities of Canaan. It was not like 2 million people could sneak up on the enemy. They would be ready and they had the military advantage of fortification. One senses the fear and dismay he must have felt in realizing that he was "heir apparent" to take Moses' place and lead these people into the Promised Land.

Joshua needed a word from God; and God came to him with a powerful message to help him overcome his fears and face in faith the challenges before him.

God's message to Joshua

I've wondered what Joshua thought when he watched his hero and mentor Moses climb Mt. Nebo and disappear into the distance. God had told him that there he would go to see the land of Canaan and there he would die. I've wondered if Joshua's eyes combed the horizon hoping that maybe Moses would come back. If so, then he could lead these people and Joshua would not have to. God broke the silence with the stunning and frank declaration!

A call to responsibility

“Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. (Joshua 1:2)

That day God said to the trembling leader of Israel, I’m making you responsible to take these people into Canaan. It was a responsibility from which there was no escape. As much as Joshua might have wished that Moses would return to take the job, such was not going to happen. He was the man God had chosen to accomplish Moses’ unfinished work! But God did not charge Joshua without a word of hope.

A call to trust!

“Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. “From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory. “No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. “Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.(Joshua 1:3-6)

It would be hard to appreciate how encouraging and assuring these words of God would have been. Look at all God promised:

God promised Joshua that he would have success everywhere.

God promised Joshua that he would have success over everyone!

God promised Joshua that he would have success his whole life!

God promised Joshua that He would be with Him every step of the way.

God told Joshua everything He needed to know. God would provide everything needed for success. The only barrier to the success of the mission would have to be supplied by Joshua and the people themselves, that is, a lack of trust in the Lord.

A call to loyalty. God exhorts Joshua to faithfulness to His word.

“Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. (Joshua 1:7)

God wanted Joshua to understand that only one thing would get in the way of his success. That would be the unfaithfulness of him and those he led. It was necessary then that he focus constantly on the word and impart the same to his people.

A call to obedience

“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do

according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. (Joshua 1:8)

If Joshua truly believed the Lord's words and accepted the Lord's commission he could go forth with faith and hope. The words of God could turn His weak and fearful heart into a strong and courageous one.

A call to courage

"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)

There is something especially powerful about the first phrase—Have I not commanded you? It is as if God is saying, "Would I ever command you to do what you cannot do?" Would He ever send us on a mission for Him that He would not give us the strength to accomplish? Augustine captured the idea in this powerful prayer, "Give what you command and command what you will!"

By this message God hoped to motivate Joshua to overcome his fears and accomplish the mission to which he had been called.

God's message for us!

In our lives there are also those intimidating moments like those I described earlier. The principles by which God instructed Joshua will also guide us in life's trembling moments.

Accept God's assignments

As much as we at times might wish that someone else could take our place or do the job, we each have to confront our own reality. We can wish for all the things that we don't have, or we can simply accept the responsibility God has given us to be parents, to be disciples, to victors in this world of sin!

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

(Ephesians 6:4)

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. (1 Timothy 5:3-4)

Trust in God's promises

God has promised that He will be with us in our efforts to serve Him.

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)

Be loyal to God's truth

'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

Depend upon God's power and presence

Likewise the kingdom of God is not for the faint-hearted; but for those who are strong in spirit and who courageously face the challenges presented to us to teach.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. (Ephesians 6:10)

Conclusion: How did Joshua respond to God's message? God's word stirred Joshua's heart!

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, to possess it.'" (Joshua 1:10-11)

Joshua had heeded the message. Now what about us?