

We are in "The Story" sermon series, telling the stories in the Bible chronologically. Let me recapture what we have talked about so far. We have started this sermon series with the story of creation. Everything that God has made is from a place of rest and peace. Everything that God has made is good until the first two humans, Adam and Eve, went against God and introduced sin into humanity. That sin separates us from God. The rest of the stories in the Bible is about the story of how God brings us back to God and restores the goodness of God's creation.

In this restoration process, God partners with those who are faithful to God and trust Him. God's first partner was "Noah," whose name means "rest and peace." From a place of rest and peace, God's rebuilding project has begun. With God's faithful partners such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, God rebuilt God's nation and promised them that they would be His bride, His treasured possession who will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for God.

About 430 years, God's people lived in Egypt waiting for God's return. Finally, their waiting was over. God chose Moses as His partner to lead God's people out of Egypt to Mount Sinai to marry God. At Mount Sinai, the covenant relationship between God and God's people was consecrated. As a wedding gift, God gave God's people *Torah* (תּוֹרָה) which we usually call 'the Law' but truly it means 'instruction' or 'guidance.' It is the instruction on how to have a happy marriage life with God. After the wedding, God and God's people had their honeymoon in the wilderness to get to know each other and work on the communication in the relationship.

Communication is the foundation of a successful relationship. According to a recent study by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML), 67.5% of marriages in the United States that ended did so primarily due to communication problems.¹ For sustaining a happy marriage and have a strong bond with our partner, there must be effective communication between the two. Communication is not just about words; but it is also about actions or non-verbal communication that holds great significance, too.

¹ Boyd, A. (2021). The number one reason for divorce and how to prevent it. Retrieved August 16, 2021, from <https://www.regain.us/advice/divorce/the-number-one-reason-for-divorce-and-how-to-prevent-it/>

In the wilderness, God spoke, but God's people did not listen well. There was a communication problem. So, the length of their honeymoon in the wilderness got extended. They spent 40 years in the wilderness instead of 11 days. After 40 years in the wilderness, God's people became more communicable and ready to move into their new home with God in the Promised Land.

At the border of the Promised Land in Shittim in the land of Moab, Moses delivered his farewell speech and final blessing to the people and declared Joshua as his successor (Deuteronomy 31-33). Moses died in the land of Moab afterward (Deuteronomy 34). That's where we are now today in the stories of the Bible.

Back at the edge of the Promised Land, face-to-face with a wall of the Jordan River, a land of warriors, and powerful cities, what would the new leader, Joshua, do? Would he abandon the wilderness of his past and embrace the hope of a better future? Or, would he give in to the negativity and rebellion of those around him?

As Joshua was wrestling with all these concerns, emotions, and insecurities, God spoke and said to him, "Be strong and very courageous" (Joshua 1:7a). God told Joshua four times, "Be strong and courageous" (Deuteronomy 31:23; Joshua 1:6, 7, 9). Not only God, but Moses also told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous" (Deuteronomy 31:7). So do the people of Israel told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:18).

Did Joshua have some fear issues? Was he a timid leader? And some of us would answer "Yes" because Joshua was told by God, Moses, and people "Be strong and courageous" again and again. But think about who Joshua is. Was he really Rookie General Chicken leading the fighting bawk bawks into battle? Isn't he one of the 12 spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan? Out of these 12 spies, 10 say "No," and Joshua and Caleb say, "Yes, go into the Promised Land with God!"

For 40 years, Joshua was mentored by Moses. He saw what leadership is. Joshua is not a brand-new rookie leader but a trained one. And yet, he was told again and again, "Be strong and courageous." How can he be stronger and more courageous? Or, what does it mean by "being strong and courageous" truly?

"Being strong" is about our ability. Apostle Paul says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Ephesians 6:10). In another place, he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Strength is about

our capability. Philemon, a leader in the Colossian church, was told that he needs to acknowledge every good thing in him because he is in Christ Jesus (Philemon 1:6). This means that he should not allow himself to feel inferior because he has been invested with some capabilities, with some potentials for being part of the body of Christ.

"Being courageous" is about having audacity. It is not about being absent of fear. To be courageous means that we are fully focused on the fact that we will defeat whatever fearful situations or enemies we face in God, with God, and for God.

Joshua is just about to lead God's people crossing the Jordan River and starting the battle against ferocious enemies. To Joshua in this situation, God says, "Be strong and courageous." How?

The verse 8 of today's scripture says, "Keep *Torah* (תּוֹרָה) always on your lips and meditate on it day and night!" The keyword here is *Hagah* (הִגָּה)! Meditation! The Hebrew word *Hagah* (הִגָּה) means "growl"—the sound a lion would make as he was ready to devour his prey. It was like the lion was saying, "This is very good!" If we feast on God's word, just as a lion ready to feast on his newly acquired lunch, then we will be strong and courageous. As we feast on the text of the Bible, we will be able to fill our lives with God's word through which we will be transformed daily to be more and more true followers of Jesus Christ.

"Being strong and courageous" is not an issue of fear but an affirmation of faith. "Being strong and courageous" is a call to bring out God's best in people. "Being strong and courageous" is not about being foolish or having our A-game on. "Being strong and courageous" is not for the strength we can muster, but for the strength the risen Savior gives. Be strong and courageous not because we are full of ourselves but because we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Be strong and courageous because our world needs to raise up Christ-followers who are strong and courageous.

And as my favorite quote from the book of Esther goes, "*Who knows, perhaps we have been raised for such a time as this?*" And that's a rhetorical question expecting a "yes" answer. If today leaves any of you wondering, the answer is we have been raised for such a time as this. So, bring out God's best in yourself and others today. Be strong and courageous! Amen.