

Sermon Series: Be Strong and Courageous

To be used with: Session Two: Be Confident in God's Power

Sermon Title Possibilities: Standing Out

The Courage To Be Different

Scripture: Joshua 3:7-17

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study of *Be Strong & Courageous: Everyday Leadership from Joshua*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

Joshua was called to stand out as a leader. In the same way leaders today will be called by God to stand out. We aren't supposed to be different or weird for the sake of being different or weird—but we stand out because the gospel is always going to be counter-cultural. Leaders must be willing to endure the loneliness of obedience.

Introduction:

A couple of years ago a video circulated of an obviously drunk guy dancing like nobody was watching. But something amazing happened—within three minutes this dancing guy had created an entire movement. The video that was circulating was a TED talk on leadership using the example of this guy to show how movements get started. Every movement starts with someone who is confident enough to stand alone.

In leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, Joshua had to be like the dancing guy. He had to confidently stand alone. But his was not an alcohol induced confidence. Joshua's confidence came from the character of YHWH. Joshua was called to stand out and do something a bit crazy—cross the Jordan River on dry land—and lead people while doing it. This would take great confidence and it would take him being willing to stand out.

Today leadership is no different. Leaders today must be confident in the Lord and stand out. Leaders are the ones who have to take that first step—the first leap of faith. We see in the third chapter of Joshua, three ways that leaders will stand out.

I. Leaders stand out by their obedience (Joshua 3:7-8)

Joshua had a history of listening to God in spite of the obstacles he faced. Every other spy (except Caleb) felt overwhelmed by the greatness of the people who dwelt in the land of Canaan. There was no way that they could overcome these giants. But Joshua and Caleb believed that God had given them this land and if God said something was going to happen—who were these giants? *They* were like grasshoppers compared to the might of God, no matter how grasshopper-like the people of Israel were themselves. So Joshua's response is not strange when God directs him to inform the priests to stand in the Jordan River. Joshua stood out from among the disobedient spies in Numbers 13 and 14 and he does it again in Joshua 3. This is because when leaders are confident in God they'll stand out by their bold obedience.

Application: God leads us today primarily through His Word. In our culture obeying the Bible is about as unthinkable as standing in a moving river and expecting it to dry up. But leaders must obey God's Word even when it isn't popular. Where do you need to courageously obey God's Word?

II. Leaders stand out by their words (Joshua 3:9-13)

Jesus makes very clear in Matthew 15:18 that the words we speak are like windows to our souls. This is, in part, what the Proverb means that “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” This goes back as far as the Garden of Eden. When the serpent challenges Eve, she responds with a subtle twist of God's Word. This is a window into what is going on in her soul—she is putting herself in a position to manipulate God's Word.

In Joshua 3, Joshua is charged with rallying the troops. Will he do it with his own grand speech? Or will he rally the troops around the sure and certain words of the Lord? Joshua chooses to rally them around God's Word. Leaders will stand out by the words they choose. Sure, you can stand out by proclaiming your own words and opinions. But leaders will last by standing on God's unadulterated Word and proclaiming Christ.

Application: What words are you relying on to lead people? Are you relying on your own ingenuity or are you relying on the life-giving Word of God? Only God can speak light into existence. Only God can by the power of His Words give life where there was once death. Our words are empty. Leaders will stand out by their words—but only the Word of the Lord will endure.

III. Leaders stand out by their faithful execution (Joshua 3:14-17)

There is an old adage that I believe every leader should take to heart: it is better to under-promise and over-deliver than to over-promise and under-deliver. Of course, with the Lord His promises are magnificent and His execution of those promises often blows our minds. But the point still stands. When leaders make big promises and then don't come through on those promises they lose trust. Imagine what would have happened if Joshua would have had his people stand in the Jordan—with great excitement and anticipation—only to be met with a river that didn't budge.

Leaders need to execute. This is a difficult point, because quite often our execution is more in the Lord's hands than our own. We can be confident in a particular plan and have it fall flat on its face. The Lord does things like this to keep leaders humble. But in a situation like Joshua's, he had a clear word from God (as sure as God's Word is to us today). It was here that Joshua dropped an anchor, knowing that God would be faithful to His Word.

As leaders we should remember that it is impossible to “over-promise” when we are sharing the great promises of God. If this is where we are putting all of our efforts in ministry we can be certain that God will always faithfully execute. God always comes through on His Word.

Conclusion:

Earlier I shared the story of the dancing guy. When he was dancing he had no idea that he was going to create a movement. In fact very little was at stake. Had nobody followed he'd have just sat down after he wore himself out and people would just have a story about a drunk dancing guy. His standing out and leading was for a silly occasion. But leaders like Joshua (and any who lead people to follow after the Lord) aren't engaging in some insignificant thing. We are confidently following the Lord in the hope that others will follow Him.

It's hard being seen as the lone ranger. Most people are okay with the spotlight of leadership. Few appreciate the loneliness of leadership. But leaders must be lonely at times, as they stand out and stand upon God's Word. Ask yourself today where you need to "step into the water"? Every Christian will have a place in life where he/she must be a leader. Will you be a leader who stands out because of your obedience to God's Word? Will you be a leader who stands out because your faithfulness to proclaim God's Word above your own? Will you be a leader who stands out because of the way God faithfully executes His promises in your life?

Ultimately, we'll all fail at times in our leadership. We'll cower in the shadows like the apostle Peter did when Jesus was crucified. We'll even go so far as to pat ourselves on the back for being "bold" when we know that nobody will oppose us. Jesus is the type of faithful leader exemplified here. He is the only leader who doesn't fail. And because He was faithful in His execution of God's plan and promise—we can rest assured that His record is delivered to ours.

At the end of the day the crux of our leadership is to be jars of clay pointing to the sufficiency of Jesus. And in whatever way we point away from ourselves and to the risen Savior we've succeeded in Christian leadership.

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