

Introduction

The theme this week is a heart of courage. We encounter Moses' successor, Joshua, ready to lead the nation of Israel into the land God promised them. Joshua is commanded to be "strong and courageous" in his task. We learn from this story and Jesus' teachings in *John* 15 how we can be people of courage in the face of fearful circumstances of life. Our understanding of the God who is with us and abiding in Him are the keys to developing a heart of courage.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over the questions below and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. What were you afraid of as a child? What, if anything, did you do to deal with that fear?
2. Who do you know who you would consider a courageous person? What about that person makes him or her courageous?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) Have someone in the group read this week's passage.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) How would you summarize (in only a sentence or two) this week's sermon for someone who was not there?
- 2) In *Joshua* 1, in the space of only four verses (6-9), Joshua is commanded three times to "be strong and courageous." **Why do you think God gives this command to Joshua repeatedly in so short of a frequency?**

What reason(s) does God give Joshua for why he should be strong and courageous?

Challenge question: **Do you see anything in the text that would give Joshua instruction on how he can develop courage? Explain.**

- 3) **What are you anxious or fearful about?**

Is there anything about God, His character, or His promises that give you reason to think you can be strong and courageous in the face of those fears?

Are there any active steps you can take to develop courage? In what ways can your small group help you with this?

- 4) Cody suggested that a way to develop a heart of courage was to abide, or remain, in Jesus. Read *John* 15:1-17. **How does Jesus characterize the branch that abides in Him and one that does not?**

According to Jesus, how do we abide in Him? (Hint: look at verses 7 and 10) Does Jesus' answer surprise you? Why or why not?

What things have you found that help you abide in Jesus?

5) How do you think abiding in Jesus can help you be strong and courageous?

Are there any times in your life where you have found courage by abiding in Jesus? Tell it to the group.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in your Life Group, take a few moments to share how either of these exercises may have changed your outlook on your daily life.**

Exercise 1: Remember God’s past faithfulness. At key moments in Israel’s history, God asks them to construct monuments so they and the generations to follow would remember what God had done for them. These “markers” would stand as tangible reminders to them in times when they were afraid or doubted that God was with them. A good spiritual practice is to find “markers” that remind you of God’s faithfulness in your past. Perhaps it is a hospital bracelet you saved that reminds you of God’s healing, or a note of encouragement from a friend that came at the right time in hard circumstances, or some other tangible object that reminds you that God is faithful and with you. Put this object in a place where you will see it frequently or, if possible, keep it with you wherever you go this week. Whenever you see it or touch it or read it this week, reflect on God’s presence with you during that time. Take time to pray and thank Him for His presence and strength that helped you through that scary or difficult circumstance. Ask Him to help you remember what He did for you the next time you encounter a similar situation where you need to have courage.

Exercise 2: Reflect on who our God is. One of the ways to develop a heart of courage is to understand *who* the God is who is with us. A weak, uncaring, unintelligent god would not engender courage in times of difficulty and distress. But our God is not like that. He is almighty, loving, and all wise. A good exercise this week is to take some time in solitude and reflect or journal on these three qualities of God—His might, His love, and His wisdom. Pay particular attention to how these three qualities of God can lead me to be courageous in those tough times. Tell another person (ideally people in your small group) the results of your reflections.