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DATE: **JANUARY 18, 2026**
SERIES: **FINISHING WELL**
MESSAGE: **THE SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND COURAGE**
PASSAGE: **JOSHUA 1:1-9**
SPEAKER: **RYAN HARMON**

When I was in the 6th grade, I had high hopes for my life. Big goals. These were my goals. I wanted to live in my parents' basement forever, I wanted to be single forever, and I wanted a Camaro. In other words, other than the Camaro, my hope was that nothing in my life would change. That everything would stay just the same.

So you can imagine my disappointment a year and a half later, when halfway through my seventh grade year, I learned that we were going to be moving to Jefferson City, Missouri. A city I'd never heard of, and I had no interest in. I was devastated by that news. Because my hope was that I somehow could experience a life that never had to undergo the pain and the process of change and transition. But as we all know, that is an empty hope, because in our lives, change is inevitable. Unavoidable.

Now, I don't think 6th grade Ryan was all that rare. In fact, I think a number of you would say that you don't love change. We don't love change and we don't love the transition that has to come with change. But we can all also agree that our lives are full of change. So the question is, how do we as God's people walk through change well? Is there a, is there a key? Is there a key to walking through change and the transition that comes with it, faithfully? That's what we want to consider together this morning.

In order to do that, we're going to look at a moment of significant transition in the life of Israel. So open your Bibles with me to Joshua chapter 1, Joshua 1.

Now, of course, the relevance of this topic is obvious for us as a church. John already mentioned in the announcements, the significant, massive change and transition that we are walking through as a church. Behind me, you can see the slide. We're going to be talking about finishing well as we anticipate Brian's last two weeks here on our staff. This is a church that, in its history prior to my becoming lead pastor in August of 2021, had only had two senior pastors. Two. Curt Lehman and Bryan Clark. And that is incredibly rare. That is a gift. Pastors don't stay around that long. I mean, we are so blessed to have had only two pastors in our history that lead us.

But that also means that we've only one time in our history experienced the process to change, the transition of, a senior pastor, leaving our staff, leaving the leadership seat that he has been in. That's only happened once. And so that means we want to walk through this moment with great intentionality. And so beginning this week, and then over the next 2 weeks, we're going to talk about transition. I'm going to do that for a moment together this morning, but we look forward to Bryan sharing with us and challenging us these next two weeks. Is there a key? Is there a key to walking through change and transition faithfully?

This moment in Israel's history was certainly one of the most momentous change and transition moments there could be. This is a moment of generational change in the life of Israel. So let's consider it together this morning. Joshua 1, verse 1:

1 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, saying, 2 "Moses, my servant, is dead;

So let me clear the air really quickly. I am not, as we walk through this text, proposing that Bryan is Moses, or that I am Joshua. Let me make that very clear. And I also want to assure you this morning, Bryan is very much alive. Just saw him in the foyer. But we need to understand in the life of Israel, this was a pivotal, a critical, moment of transition. A massive change. And the Lord, Yahweh, makes that abundantly clear by his first words to Joshua. Says to Joshua, Moses, my servant is dead. Blunt. To the point. Couldn't be more clear. This is a big moment.

I want you to just use your imagination with me for a moment this morning and consider what this must have been like for the people of Israel.At this moment, Israel is camped on the east side of the Jordan River. To their east is what is modern day Jordan, but it was a vast wilderness at that time. To their west is the Jordan River, and across the river was the promised land, the land of Canaan. But understand that all around them were foreign nations, foreign people, foreign kings. And they were hostile. They would go to war if others would try to encroach on their territory. That's where Israel sat in this moment.

Now, this was a people that had been wandering for 40 years. They were nomads, and they were wandering as a result of their rebellion, of their disobedience. 40 years prior, God delivered them out of Egypt, brought them through the Red Sea, met them in the wilderness, gave them his law at Sinai, led them by a cloud, led them by a pillar of fire. And then as that journey continued, they made their way north, and they sat on the edge of the promised land. And in that moment, they sent spies into the land to see what it would be like. And the spies came back and gave a report, and they said two things. They said, the land is amazing, it is flowing with milk and honey, but the people are terrifying. They're giants. And as a result of that report, the people of Israel were struck with fear and they rebelled in disbelief. They began to wonder, could we find a different leader that would turn us around and walk us back towards Egypt?

Let's go back to what we know. That was their rebellion. And as a result, God said now you are going to wander. And it began this 40-year period in the wilderness. No doubt God was working with them during that time. He was feeding them by manna. He was forming them into a people. But this was a consequence of their lack of faith.

Now, over the course of those 40 years, eventually, the generation that led that rebellion died off, and now in this moment, a new generation sits once again on the border, on the edge of the promised land. These are people who had been through more than we can possibly imagine. More difficult experiences, more miracles. They had seen so much, but understand that everything they had seen, everything they had experienced was accompanied by a human face, a human leader that represented for them, their connection to God. Every step of the way, Moses was there. And now, Moses, God's servant, was dead.

The end of Deuteronomy, the chapter before Joshua 1, tells us about Moses' death. Moses was not allowed to go into the promised land. The Lord said, you're not going to step foot in the promised land, but he did grant that Moses could climb up Mount Nebo, which is very near to where they were camping in this moment. And Moses set his eyes on the land of promise, and then he died. And Israel went into a period of mourning, 30 days of mourning, of grieving the loss of Moses.

If you could have talked to an Israelite in that moment as they sat in their tents mourning, what do you think you would have heard from them? I have no doubt that from many of them, you would have heard confusion. You would have heard questions, you would have heard fear. This was a significant moment for them. They were in the midst of generational change, and fear during change

and transition is absolutely natural. Moses was dead. Moses was dead, and now after 30 days, the Lord has begun to spoke to to Joshua. Let's see what else the Lord has to say. Beginning again in verse 2:

> *2 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.*

It was absolutely appropriate to grieve and mourn the loss of Moses. But what is very clear is that the Lord is saying to Israel and to Joshua, the time for mourning is done. Now, get up. Arise. Essentially, that phrase means time to get up off your bed. It's time to get out of your tent. It's time to roll up your sleeves. We have work to do. The time for mourning has come to a close. It's time to get to work.

I think we can all say that in the midst of mourning, in the midst of grieving, that is not necessarily a message that we want to hear, but often it's precisely what we need to hear. This is an important reminder to Israel in this moment that although Moses certainly had an absolutely unique relationship with God, Moses' relationship with God is unbelievable to consider. He called God called Moses his friend and we're told that he spoke to the Lord face to face. An incredible relationship. But here's the important thing that Israel couldn't forget. God has a mission. He has plans. And the death of Moses did not alter or change any of God's plans.

Moses was dead, but the mission would continue. And God here was calling Joshua and Israel along with him to join him in the continued mission, to get back to work. And here was the mission: they were to cross the Jordan, and they were to take the land that God had promised to give them. So two realities. Moses is dead, the mission continues.

This is an important thing for us as Christians and certainly for leaders to come to grips with, to understand that the Lord calls us to join him in his work, and he prompts us, and he empowers us. He does all of those things, but it's very important that we as people understand, he does not need us. He doesn't need us. We get the joy of participation, but his work continues, and we should be quite thankful for that because that means long after we are gone, his work is going to continue. That means that when we're sleeping at night, his work continues. He calls us to participate, but he doesn't need us. God will accomplish his mission.

I had to come to grips with this when I first decided to go to Spain. I was a young adult pastor. I had been the young adult pastor for 4 years, and I loved that group of people I was working with and walking alongside, and when we left for Spain, I had a concern, and I think it was a healthy concern at the time, my concern was, how will these people continue to be shepherded? I just, I wanted to make sure that was going to happen, and I think that was a healthy concern. I had another concern that I don't think was healthy, and it was this: what are they gonna do without me? I'm so important. I'm so necessary. And it didn't take very long before I was in Spain, and I got word of how things were going back in Lincoln, and you know how they were going? Wonderfully. Everything was wonderful. God's work was marching on. In fact, in some ways, it probably was better than it was when I was leading. And in that moment, I had a different challenge that I had to walk through, the challenge of coming to grips with the fact that I am not as important as I think I am. God is the one that leads.

That is good for our souls, but it is a difficult thing to come to grips with. We want to think that we are absolutely necessary, and it's not gonna happen without us, but God makes it abundantly clear, he's the leader. He's in charge, and his mission continues. We get the joy of participating in that work. Moses is dead. Now, therefore, arise. It's time to take the land. As God continues with Joshua, he talks about that land that he is going to give them. Verse 3:

> *3 Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. 4 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.*

These were a nomadic people living in tents for 40 years. No permanent location. And God here says, I am giving you an expansive land, over 12,000 square miles. Unthinkable. And all of it is a gift of his grace, not because they had done anything to earn it. All of it is a gift, a fulfillment of the fact that God keeps his promises. Because years and years, centuries prior, he said to Abraham, here's what I'm going to give you, Abraham. I'm going to give you descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashores. And I'm gonna bless the whole world through you. And I'm gonna give your people a land. And God keeps his promises. Purely as an act of his grace.

But that land, make no mistake, was not vacant. This wasn't uninhabited land. You need to remember that 40 years prior, Israel was terrified. They rebelled because that land was full of big, bad, warring, hostile people. They had to leave their tents, they had to get on with God's mission, but surely in that moment, even though this was a new generation, they understood, they remembered that the previous generation was terrified. They were terrified. This was fresh in everyone's mind. And that's why God, who is always so gracious, is always willing to meet us right where we are, as he continues to talk to Joshua he addresses the fact that there will be people in the land. And he gives them a word of hope. Verse five, he says:

> *5 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. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.*

There were people in the land. There were people who struck terror, struck fear in the previous generation. Those people were still there, but despite the fact that the people were still there, and despite the fact that Israel, as they entered the land, had to anticipate conflict, the Lord issued a charge to them. He said, be strong, be strong and courageous. One commentator said that these two words together like this could be translated this way, be unshakably courageous. Unshakably courageous. They were to leave the comfort of their tents, the safety of all that they knew, they were to shift from a posture of mourning to a posture of courage, and they were to join God in the work that he was calling them to. To take up his mission. Cross the river.

And as they would cross the river they would encounter conflict. That fact is implied in what the Lord said. The Lord said, no man will be able to stand before you, but within that sentence is the implication there will be people they will encounter, and those people will try to stand against them. But they're also a word of hope that they won't be able to. In other words, Israel will be victorious, even though people will resist them. And why will they be victorious? Is it because they are such an incredible army? No, the reason they will be victorious is because God's presence will be with them. He says, I will be with you just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you.

See, Moses was a great leader, there's no question. But Moses' success as a leader was not on account of, was not the result of, his natural giftedness. Moses was successful because God was with him. Although Moses was now dead, see, God was very much still present. Therefore, he says, just as I was with Moses. And that's why he was successful. I will be with you, I will not fail you, I won't forsake you. And because of that, because of God's promised presence with his people, because of that they were to be courageous and strong. Be strong and courageous, the Lord commands. Based, grounded in the reality, the fact of his ongoing presence with them.

This wasn't some sort of fake, stirred up strength and courage. He wasn't saying, hey, act like tough guys. This wasn't fake courage, fake strength. This was the real deal. The real deal based in the reality that someone was with them, who was more than able to help them overcome whatever they would encounter. Therefore, they had courage and their courage was supported and supplied by God and his very presence with them.

This was not strength that they mustered up. This wasn't courage they talked themselves into. Be strong. But your strength cannot be based in your own strength. Be courageous. But your courage is not based upon your own abilities. It's based on God who is with you. Be strong and courageous. Don't fake it, but take hold of it by faith. Now as the Lord continues, he adds what I want to encourage you to think of as a word of very practical counsel. Very practical counsel. So verse 7 says it again, this command:

> *7 Only be strong and very courageous;*

So there's that call again, but now, instead of saying as he did before, I'll be with you, he says something different.

> *7 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. 8 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.*

The framing I want you to consider here is that this is practical counsel that the Lord is giving. And here's why I say that. It is very easy to hear this passage and almost read it as an encouragement to a transactional faith, or even worse, a legalistic approach to our relationship with God. Legalism is this at its heart: legalism is the belief that through our right behavior, through our perfect law keeping, through doing everything just right, we can earn God's favor, or God's blessing. At the heart of legalism lies an attitude of earning.

So a legalistic reading or understanding of these two verses, verses 7 and 8, would hear it this way. Okay, the Lord is saying if I do everything right, then I am guaranteed success. And actually, the Lord is obligated to give it to me because he told me if I do everything right, I'll be successful. God has to do it. That's the math of legalism. A plus B always equals C, and we are obligated to receive C because we did A plus B. God has to do it. God has to do it. That type of thinking, that approach, leads to a faith that is that is based on earning and it is absolutely deadening. And it's important that we understand it stands in contradiction, it's absolutely contrary, to the message of the New Testament, the message of grace, and also, the message of the Old Testament. This is not how God works.

So what is at work here? What's going on? Well, I said I want you to think about it as practical counsel. So here's how God intended Israel to receive, to approach, his law, his commandments. They were to see them and cherish them as God's loving communication to and for his people. See, in the ancient world, all these pagan gods, these fake gods, none of them communicated to their people. Only the living God communicated what he desires, how they're to approach him, how they're to worship him, the way their community is to function together. The living God communicated, gave his instruction, to his people so that it would help them. It would be his very wisdom for how they would be a community and how they would live with him. They were to hear it, and they were to understand this is God's wisdom for us. We want to walk in it, and if we approach it that way, not as a transaction, not as anything that we earn, but if we approach God's law as something that we want to walk in, that we understand. I don't want to turn to the right or the left, I want to stay on the Lord's path. If we understand it that way, then to memorize it so that you could meditate on it. To meditate is to

mutter. It literally means to mutter. And the image is that these people would love God's law, because it came from the living God so much that they just want to reflect on it. Just chew on it. If that was the approach, then it wouldn't be an approach of legalism, as if they were earning, it would be a way, a very practical way, of seeking after and clinging to God.

See, legalism kills, but faith clings to God in dependance. Faith seeks to find ways, practical ways, to abide in him. And so we cherish his word. God was calling his people to be people who clung to him, who sought after him, who abided in him. And with that abiding does come a guarantee: God will bring us out on the right end. He will give us success as he defines it, not because we've done everything right, but because he is our God, and he brings us into green pastures. So he says, if you cling to me, Israel, if you cling to me. It's gonna be okay. This was a call to faith, a call to get up in faith, to leave their tents, leave the safety of the tent, to join God in mission, to reflect upon his presence with them. And because of it, to be full of courage and step out on this mission, this adventure that God was calling them to. Confident because of his presence.

Finally, as we get to the last verse of this speech, The Lord turns to Joshua and invites him to respond. He does that with a question. Verse nine, he says:

> *9 Have I not commanded you?*

A question, followed by this command, this encouragement once again:

> *9 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."*

Have I not commanded you? It's an invitation to respond. The Lord calls us, he gives us a vision for where he is going to take us, and then he says, will you respond? Will you join me? Will you step out in faith from the safety of your tent? Will you ford the river with me? Will you begin the march towards Jericho? Will you join me in the taking of the promised land? But notice that invitation, that call to response, that it's sandwiched, that it's couched in these words of encouragement, once again. The promise of his very presence. He says, be strong and courageous again. Don't tremble, don't be dismayed. I will be with you. The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

So will Joshua, will Israel, respond in faith? Will God's people step out of comfort and join him in mission? Moments of change and the transition that come with moments of change, they are opportunities for fear, there is no question. That is a very human, very natural response. But we also need to be expectant because they are opportunities for great faith. They are opportunities to experience God's presence and to join him on mission. That's why we, as believers, are able to step into change with strength and with courage. Will we, as his people, respond? Well, we don't have time to to go through the entire story of Joshua, of course. But here's the condensed version.

Israel did respond in faith. They did get up out of their tents. They packed up camp and they began the march towards Jericho, and in time, God gave them the promised land. They entered into the land of promise, inhabited those cities. The people who were once wandering became the people of the land, the people of the promised land. What is the key? What is the key to walking through change and the transition that comes with it faithfully? It's clinging to God. It's abiding in him. To understanding that he is with us, and because he is with us, we can be full of strength and courage. That's what Israel did. That's what God's people have done throughout history as they have walked through moments, periods, of significant transition.

So the question now for us as we consider this week and the following two weeks, this moment of transition, the question is, how will we respond? Is our moment all that different? I mean, obviously,

we're not trying to buy more land, okay? We're not expanding. But we are walking through a moment of transition. We are in a world full of change. We are called by Jesus himself to partner with him, to join him in mission. Jesus in his final moments with his disciples in the book of Matthew offered them words of commission, and also words of great hope and promise. In words that, when we read them side by side with Joshua, sound incredibly reminiscent of the Lord's words to Joshua.

Jesus during that great moment of transition, called his people to be about his mission. The end of the book of Matthew, he gathers his disciples together with him, and they know a big change is coming, a big transition is coming. His ministry upon the earth is coming to an end, but the mission was absolutely supposed to continue. And so with that in mind, he looked at his disciples, and he offered them these words that we're also familiar with. We call these the Great Commission. Matthew 28, verses 18 to 20, Jesus says, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. And lo, listen, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

God's people, we have been given an audacious mission. To make disciples of all the nations, all people upon the earth, help them become disciples of Jesus. Audacious, overwhelming. Overwhelming if we have to do it alone. But he also issued an audacious word of hope, an audacious promise. He said, Jesus said, I will be with you always, even to the very end. Until the end of the age.

I didn't want to leave my basement. Israel may not have wanted to leave their tent. But the Lord calls his people to mission. The Lord calls us to join him. And as he calls us, he offers us a word of hope. He says, now therefore, arise, roll up your sleeves, join me in what I am about to do, knowing that I am with you. Therefore, be strong and courageous.

These next three weeks, we want to walk intentionally. And we want to walk expectantly. We want to thank the Lord for where he has led us. We want to thank him for who he has had lead us. I am so thankful for my pastor, Bryan. But we also want to be fully expectant, expectant that the Lord is calling us to continue to march with him as his work moves forward. To do that full of hope, knowing that he will be with us always. And because of that, we can march forward in mission full of strength and full of courage.

Our Father, we thank you. We thank you that you promise to never leave, to never fail, to never forsake, Jesus. That you double down on that promise. And on Pentecost, the pouring out of your Spirit, that took on a whole new meaning. And now we are people that not only know that you are around us, you are in us by your Spirit. And so Lord, we ask that in these days of transition, you will help us to be people that are full of strength and full of courage. And also full of gratitude, that we be thankful for where you have led us these 60-plus years, and that we'd be thankful for who you have had lead us. But in the midst of that gratitude, we'd never forget you are the one leading the charge, and your march continues on. So stir up in us a great vision for an amazing future with you. We ask that you would do this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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