

Starting strong and Staying strong

We are probably all starting the New Year (2011) with fresh hope and expectation, and especially those of us who finished strong in 2011. However, whatever has happened in the past doesn't matter now. It has brought us this far so we need to *"start strong and stay strong."* But starting strong and staying strong takes **strength** and **courage**.

Joshua 1:1-9 ...*After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be **strong and of good courage**, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only **be strong and very courageous**, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and of good courage**; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God **is with you wherever you go.**"*

Like Joshua, whenever we are about to step into something new, it's very likely that fear will present itself. Fear of the future, fear of the unknown, and fear of responsibility. Sometimes we are prepared and sometimes we're not. Sometimes we are unsure or anxious because we know life is not always easy. Life is about the heart and soul of our loved ones and our friends. Life is about the survival of our jobs and businesses. Life is about the effectiveness of our church. But more than anything, life is about the heart and soul of **God**. This is why the Lord said to Joshua, *"Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* A few verses earlier He said, *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you."* Notice, life is about the presence of God being with us!

Here, Joshua is being given his chance to take make a difference. To change a nation and go down in history. But God knew that there was a tendency for Joshua to get into fear. So three times God says, **"Be strong and courageous."** Maybe Joshua was fearful at having to replace the 'all-star world famous former leader' named Moses. Moses had faithfully followed God. Moses had led Israel out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Moses stayed with his people through the 40 years of wandering in the desert. Moses fought dissension and rebellion. Yet now, God chooses Joshua to be the new leader.

God chose Joshua to lead the people out of the desert, across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. But they would have to fight to take the land. They would have to work hard to stay together or be pulled apart by discord and selfishness. They would face the allure of wealth that could make them forget God and give up before they were finished. They would also face the trap of compromising their values in order to get

along with their neighbors’.

Therefore, God needed a **strong** leader. So God has a ‘one-on-one’ conversation with Joshua. God gives Joshua a strategy by which He will be able to make not just one but many winning decisions. What does God give Joshua? God gives Joshua three things. He gives him (1) *two promises*, (2) *one provision* and (3) *two challenges*. God tells Joshua that if he will trust the **promises**, use the **provision**, and answer the two **challenges** he will become the leader He wants him to be.

What is God’s first **promise** to Joshua? God tells Joshua that He will give Joshua and the people all the land upon which they put their feet. The land; full of enemies, covered with temptations, and yet to be taken; is only God’s to give. Therefore, God tells Joshua, “*I will give it to you.*” Note, God is asking Joshua see the future as He sees the future. God is saying – “*Joshua you and I stand on this side of the Jordan River but look with Me across to the other side. Joshua walk with Me down the roads and up the mountains and across the plains of the Promise Land. Joshua see yourself leading My people across this land. Joshua, walk with Me, have faith in Me, and believe My promises. I will give you this land.*” And what God has promised is possible - even if it appears to be impossible!

What do you believe is possible for your life in 2011? God said to Joshua, “*I will give you the land.*” God is saying to you - “*I will give you health, wealth, a family, a business, a school, a church, a city and a nation.*” This is the first promise of God to you! However, as great as God’s first promise is, the second **promise** is probably more important. What was God’s second promise? “*I, the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*” At the same time that God asks Joshua to look into the future and see a totally new way of life, God promises He will be right there with him - every step of the way.

What challenges do you face in 2011? By faith, what new places do you want to move your family, your business, your marriage or your friendships into? Will it be hard? Probably! Will you have to change the way you think and act? Most likely! Will others resist some of these changes? Very possibly! Will you make mistakes? Definitely! Will changes take longer than you hope? In all likelihood! Will you at times feel like you are alone? Maybe! Will you be alone? **No!** The Lord will not leave you alone. Just as with Joshua, He will be with you wherever you go!

However, there’s far more. God also gives us an important **provision** as we step out, as we go into 2011. God says, “*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth: meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success*” (Joshua 1:8). Many times in 2010 we were encouraged to declare that the written Word of God is given for *information, instruction and inspiration*. Do you really believe this? If you do, how do you live out that affirmation? How can you get the principles of the Bible into your mind and heart so that their truths can inform, instruct and inspire you throughout 2011? Because if you do, “*you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*”

Note, God has given two promises and one provision. Now He looks deep into Joshua’s eyes and gives him two **challenges**. The first challenge is very practical: “*Joshua get ready to cross the Jordan River.*” In other

words, “*Get ready to take the first step.*” At this point, God does a very interesting thing with Joshua. On one hand, He shows him a vision of the enormous task ahead (of conquering the Promised Land). On the other hand, God starts quite modest. He doesn’t even tell Joshua to cross the Jordan River.

God simply asks Joshua to take the **first step** and get the people ready to cross. Preparation is crucial to success! The questions is, “*Are you ready to step into the land of promise?*” “*And, what of God’s promises are you going to step into this year?*”

Some of you can probably see great changes for your family, your business, your leadership in this church, and even your own heart. Some of you can see great changes for the city of London or another place in the world. Yet, if you tried to make these changes all at once you would most likely fail. And God does not want you to fail. So God is asking you to get **ready** - to be prepared to take the next step. However small that step may be!

What is the **next step** you need to take to bring about positive change in your life? God is asking you to have simple, childlike faith and take a small step. After that, God will ask you for faith to take the next step, and the next step, and the next. Later, God takes all those “next steps” and adds to them His **might** and **power**. Then suddenly, beyond all those small steps you discover that you’ve occupied the Promised Land of God’s blessings. So what is your next small step?

The final **challenge** God gives Joshua is the challenge of his heart and soul. Do you know that lack of ability is not what keeps most people from succeeding at a great work or deep change in life? Most of us stop short of success or change because we loose heart. We stop believing in what God has **called** us to do. So we loose faith that change will come. We loose patience with God. We see our weaknesses and settle for far less than what God has for us. It may have been the same for Joshua.

God’s **challenge** is; “*Joshua be **strong** and **courageous**. Joshua cast down your fear. Joshua keep your faith when the battle is raging. Joshua be big enough to admit your mistakes. Joshua tell yourself to believe in Me alone. Joshua trust in My faithfulness from the start. Joshua, I am the Lord of this Promised Land. Joshua I am the Creator and Saviour of this nation. Joshua I am your God, I will never leave you of forsake you. Joshua I have chosen you. Joshua you are my Captain. Joshua be **strong** and **courageous**.*”

Can you hear the Lord saying the same to you? You are His captain for your family. You are His captain for your business. You are His captain for your school or university. You are a captain among other captains in His church. So Captain – Be Strong and Be Courageous! If you believe that God Himself has given you this challenge, you will **start 2011 strong** and **stay strong** throughout the year. Remember, He will never challenge you to do anything He is not willing to help you with. God is always there for you!

To recap... For 2011:

- God has given two **promises**; (1) He will give us every promise we step into, and (2) He will be with us wherever we go.

- God has given one **provision**, one thing to sustain us throughout the year - He has given us His written Word.
- God has given us two **challenges**, (1) To be prepared and get ready to take the next step, and (2) to be strong and courageous.

This way, you will **start strong** and **stay strong!**