

The Book of Joshua, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: Be Strong and Courageous: Joshua Commissioned

Joshua 1:1–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening lesson sets the doctrinal foundation for the entire study of Joshua, and the truth at stake is the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises. The land Israel is about to enter is not seized by human ambition; it is received as the fulfillment of a promise God made to Abraham four hundred years earlier (Genesis 12:7; 15:18–21). Your students need to see from the start that Joshua is not first a book about conquest or courage but a book about a promise-keeping God. Help them hold this firmly, because it guards against two errors: treating the conquest as a model for human aggression, and reading the land promise through a premillennial lens that expects a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel. Scripture teaches that these promises find their yes in Christ and His church (Galatians 3:16, 26–29), and that the rest in Canaan was a shadow of the better and eternal rest that remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4:1–11).

The lesson is also aiming squarely at the spiritual formation of your students. The command repeated to Joshua, be strong and of good courage, is one every believer needs, but it must be taught correctly. The courage God commands is not self-confidence; it is confidence in the presence and faithfulness of God. Most of your students are standing at some threshold, a fear, a decision, a calling they have been avoiding, and the heart of this lesson is to move them from courage rooted in their own ability to courage rooted in God's promise to be with them. Tie this directly to Christ, who gives the church the very same promise, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

Keep the tone warm and personal even while handling the weighty truth of God's covenant faithfulness. Joshua 1 is the doorway to the whole book; if your students leave this lesson trusting that God keeps His word and that His presence, not their strength, is the source of courage, you will have set the foundation well.

Question 1

Student Question:

God begins by reminding Joshua that the land is a gift He had already promised: "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses" (Joshua 1:3). How does grounding the conquest in a promise made centuries earlier to Abraham shape the way we should understand what is about to happen, and what does it reveal about God's faithfulness across generations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by anchoring the whole book where God anchors it: in a promise. The land is described as something God has already given, “as I said unto Moses” (Joshua 1:3), reaching back through Moses to the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 15:18–21; 17:8). Help students feel the weight of this. Four centuries had passed, generations had lived and died in Egypt and the wilderness, and God had forgotten nothing. The conquest is not Israel taking what it wants; it is God keeping what He promised.

Stress that this frames everything that follows. Every victory in the book is a fulfillment, not an achievement. This is why Joshua 21:43–45 will declare at the end that not one word of God’s good promises failed. The author wants us to read the whole conquest with that ending in view.

Draw out the doctrinal lesson about God’s faithfulness across generations. The God who keeps a promise made centuries earlier to Abraham is the same God who has kept His promise to send the Seed of Abraham, Christ, in whom all nations are blessed (Galatians 3:16). God’s faithfulness is not a sometime thing; it is His character. Believers today rest on the same promise-keeping God.

Be careful here to keep the land in its proper place in redemptive history. The earthly inheritance was real, but it was always pointing beyond itself to a better and eternal rest in Christ (Hebrews 4:1–11). Plant that seed now; it will matter greatly in later lessons.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s covenant faithfulness as the foundation of the whole book of Joshua.
- The conquest understood as God keeping a promise, not Israel pursuing ambition.
- The continuity of God’s promises from Abraham through Moses to Joshua and ultimately to Christ.
- The danger of reading the land promise as a future earthly, political kingdom rather than its fulfillment in Christ and His church (Galatians 3:26–29).
- God’s character: He keeps His word across generations, so His people can trust Him completely.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it tell us about God that He kept a promise made four hundred years earlier?
- How does seeing the conquest as the fulfillment of a promise change the way we read the rest of Joshua?
- Where in your own life are you waiting on a promise of God, and how does His faithfulness to Abraham encourage you?

Question 2

Student Question:

Four times God commands Joshua to “be strong and of good courage,” yet each time He ties that courage to His own presence rather than to Joshua’s ability. Where in your life have you been trying to manufacture courage out of your own confidence, and what would change if your courage were anchored instead in God’s promise to be with you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the aim is honesty about where our courage actually comes from. Walk students through the four commands to be strong and courageous (Joshua 1:6,7,9, with the people echoing it in v.18) and show that every single one is tied to God’s presence, not Joshua’s competence.

Gently expose the counterfeit. Much of what passes for courage in our culture is really self-confidence, a belief in our own abilities, resources, or grit. That kind of courage works only as far as our abilities reach, and it collapses at the edge of an uncrossable river. God offers Joshua something better: courage that rests on the promise “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

Help each person locate the actual ground they are standing on. When they face fear, do they rehearse their own strengths, or do they rehearse God’s promises? The difference shows up most clearly when their strengths run out.

Move toward something concrete. Invite each person to name one fear they are facing and to practice replacing self-talk (“I can handle this”) with God-talk (“the Lord my God is with me wherever I go”).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between self-confidence and confidence in God.
- Courage as a fruit of trusting God’s presence, not a personality trait.
- The fragility of courage built on our own abilities.
- God’s promise of presence as the believer’s true and unfailing strength.
- Honest self-examination about where we actually turn when afraid.

Discussion Prompts

- When you feel afraid, what do you instinctively rehearse, your abilities or God’s promises?
- What is the difference between bravery and the courage God commands here?
- Name one fear you are facing this week. How would it change if your courage rested on God being with you?

Question 3

Student Question:

God tells Joshua that the key to success is meditating on the Book of the Law day and night and being careful to obey it (Joshua 1:7-8). Why does God connect courage and success so directly to

a steady diet of His Word and obedience to it, and what does this teach us about where real strength comes from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Point students to the striking link God makes between courage, success, and Scripture. Joshua is to meditate on the Book of the Law day and night and to be careful to do all that is written in it (Joshua 1:7–8). The path to courageous, successful leadership runs through a steady, obedient relationship with God’s Word.

Explain “meditate” rightly. The Hebrew idea is not emptying the mind but filling it, muttering and turning the Word over continually, the way Psalm 1 pictures the blessed man. This is immersion, not occasional reference. The Word is to be the constant companion of the leader.

Stress the inseparable bond between hearing and doing. God does not say merely to read or memorize but to be careful to do. James later makes the same point: the blessing is for the doer, not the hearer only (James 1:22–25). Knowledge that does not become obedience is not the strength God promises.

Draw the timeless principle: real strength for God’s people has always come from a Word-saturated, obedient life. This is as true for the Christian under the New Covenant, who is to let the word of Christ dwell richly within (Colossians 3:16), as it was for Joshua. Affirm the absolute authority of Scripture as the source of this strength.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority of God’s Word as the source of strength and direction.
- Biblical meditation as continual, immersive attention to Scripture.
- The inseparable connection between hearing the Word and obeying it (James 1:22).
- Spiritual strength as the fruit of a Word-saturated life, then and now.
- The New Covenant parallel: letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God tie courage and success so directly to meditating on His Word?
- What is the difference between reading the Bible and meditating on it as Joshua was told to?
- What would it look like, practically, for God’s Word to be your constant companion this week?

Question 4

Student Question:

Joshua 1:8 promises that the one who meditates on God’s Word and obeys it will “make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” How do you guard this promise against the

modern distortion that following God guarantees comfort, wealth, or an easy life, and what does true prosperity look like for a follower of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses against a real and present danger: the prosperity distortion of Joshua 1:8. Many have torn this verse from its context to promise wealth, comfort, and an easy life to anyone who reads their Bible. Help students handle the promise faithfully.

Clarify what “prosperous” and “good success” mean in context. The success in view is the success of the mission God gave, taking the land He promised, accomplished through obedience. It is covenant faithfulness rewarded, not a guarantee of ease. The same Joshua who received this promise would face war, loss, and decades of hard labor.

Set this against the witness of the whole of Scripture. Faithful people have suffered (Hebrews 11:35–38), and the Lord Himself, perfectly obedient, walked the road of the cross. True prosperity is being and doing what God made us for, not the absence of hardship. Press students to define success the way Scripture does, not the way the culture does.

Bring it home personally. Where have students absorbed the lie that following God should make life comfortable, and how has that lie set them up for disappointment or doubt when obedience proved costly?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Guarding Joshua 1:8 against the prosperity gospel distortion.
- Biblical success as covenant faithfulness, not guaranteed wealth or ease.
- The reality that faithful people suffer (Hebrews 11:35–38).
- Redefining prosperity as being and doing what God made us for.
- The danger of measuring our walk with God by comfort rather than faithfulness.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you heard Joshua 1:8 used to promise comfort or wealth, and why is that a distortion?
- How would you define real prosperity for a follower of Christ?
- When obedience has cost you something, how did you respond, and what did it reveal about your expectations?

Question 5

Student Question:

Three times God says “I will be with thee” or “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5). How does the abiding presence of God serve as the foundation of everything God asks of Joshua,

and how is this same promise fulfilled even more fully for the Christian in Christ (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center this question on the heart of the chapter: the presence of God. Three times God assures Joshua, “I will be with thee” and “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5). Everything God commands rests on this. Take away the presence of God and the courage, the obedience, and the conquest all collapse.

Trace this promise as a golden thread through Scripture. It is what God promised Moses (Exodus 3:12), what He promises here to Joshua, and what He promises the church in Christ: “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20), and “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). The same God, the same promise, now secured for the believer in Christ.

Make the Christological connection explicit but accurate. The Christian enjoys this presence even more fully than Joshua, through the indwelling Holy Spirit and the abiding presence of the risen Christ with His church. This is not Old Covenant nostalgia; it is a present reality for those who are in Christ.

Help students see that this changes the question they ask in hard times. The question is not first “am I strong enough?” but “is God with me?” For the faithful child of God, the answer is settled, and from that settled answer flows courage.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The presence of God as the foundation of everything He asks of His people.
- The continuity of the promise of presence from Moses to Joshua to the church.
- Christ’s promise to be with His people always (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5).
- The fuller New Covenant reality of God’s presence through the indwelling Spirit.
- Reframing our fears around the question of God’s presence rather than our strength.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the presence of God the foundation of everything else God commands Joshua to do?
- How is the promise of God’s presence even fuller for the Christian than it was for Joshua?
- How would facing your current fears change if you were truly convinced God is with you?

Question 6

Student Question:

God commands Joshua to obey the law and to “turn not from it to the right hand or to the left” (Joshua 1:7). In what specific area of your life are you most tempted to turn to the right hand or to the left, to soften or sidestep what God has clearly said, and what would full obedience look like there this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question targets the subtle ways we turn from full obedience. God tells Joshua not to turn from the law “to the right hand or to the left” (Joshua 1:7), an image of veering off a straight path in either direction. Help students see that disobedience is not always a dramatic rejection; it is often a quiet drift.

Name the two directions concretely. Turning to one side can mean softening God’s commands, explaining them away, deciding they do not quite apply to us. Turning to the other can mean adding to them, drifting into legalism or self-made rules. Both are departures from the straight path of simply doing what God said.

Press for honesty about the specific area. Most people have one place where they consistently negotiate with God’s clear Word, money, speech, sexual purity, forgiveness, a relationship, a habit. The goal is to bring that one area into the light.

Move toward repentance and concrete obedience. What would it look like this week to stop softening or sidestepping and simply obey? Encourage students to name one step.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Disobedience as a quiet drift, not only a dramatic rebellion.
- Turning to the right or left: softening God’s Word or adding to it.
- The call to simple, full obedience to what God has clearly said.
- Honest identification of the one area where we negotiate with God.
- Repentance as turning back to the straight path of obedience.

Discussion Prompts

- In what area are you most tempted to soften or sidestep what God has clearly said?
- Is your temptation more to explain God’s commands away, or to add rules He never gave?
- What is one concrete step of full obedience God is calling you to this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The land of Canaan was the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to Abraham, yet the New Testament teaches that this earthly rest was a shadow of a greater rest that remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4:1–11). How should we understand the land promise so that we neither empty it of meaning nor turn it into the expectation of a future earthly, political kingdom?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is one of the doctrinally sensitive questions of the lesson, dealing with how to understand the land promise. Handle it with care, because it is here that premillennial and dispensational

readings go wrong. The land of Canaan was a genuine, historical fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:18–21; Joshua 21:43–45), and we must not empty that of meaning.

But Scripture itself teaches that the earthly rest in Canaan was never the final goal. Hebrews 4:1–11 explicitly treats the rest Joshua gave as a shadow of a greater rest that still remained for the people of God, a rest entered by faith in Christ. The writer says plainly that if Joshua had given them the final rest, God would not have spoken later of another day (Hebrews 4:8). The land pointed beyond itself.

Guard students against the error of expecting a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel. The promises to Abraham find their yes in Christ, the true Seed (Galatians 3:16), and all who are in Christ, Jew and Gentile, are Abraham's heirs (Galatians 3:26–29). The kingdom God promised is the reign of Christ now from the right hand of the Father (Daniel 2:44; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13), not a coming earthly political kingdom.

Hold the two truths together so students neither flatten the land into mere symbol nor inflate it into an unfulfilled political hope. The land was real and the promise was kept; and the land was a signpost to the better, eternal rest that is ours in Christ and will be ours fully in the new heavens and new earth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The land as a genuine, historical fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Joshua 21:43–45).
- The earthly rest in Canaan as a shadow of the greater rest in Christ (Hebrews 4:1–11).
- The promises to Abraham fulfilled in Christ and His church, not a future political Israel (Galatians 3:26–29).
- The kingdom of God as the present reign of Christ, established at Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13).
- Avoiding both errors: emptying the land of meaning, or turning it into an unfulfilled earthly hope.

Discussion Prompts

- In what sense was the land a real fulfillment of God's promise, and in what sense did it point beyond itself?
- How does Hebrews 4 help us understand the rest Joshua gave Israel?
- Why does it matter that the promises to Abraham are fulfilled in Christ and His church rather than in a future political kingdom?

Question 8

Student Question:

The leaders of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh pledge their full support to Joshua and the rest of the tribes, promising to help their brothers until they too find rest (Joshua 1:16–18). Where is God calling you to set aside your own comfort or settledness to help carry the burden of your brothers and sisters in the Lord's church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws out the example of the eastern tribes. Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh had already received their inheritance east of the Jordan, yet they pledge to cross over armed and fight alongside their brothers until everyone has rest (Joshua 1:12–18). They had every excuse to settle down; they chose solidarity instead.

Hold up their example as a picture of self-giving love within the people of God. Their own settledness did not excuse them from the struggle of their brothers. Connect this to the New Testament call to bear one another's burdens and to count others' interests as our own (Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:3–4).

Press students to locate the specific cost. It is easy to admire the eastern tribes in theory. The question is where each person is being called to set aside their own comfort, their own settledness, to help carry a brother or sister in the Lord's church who is still in the fight, the grieving, the struggling, the new, the weak.

Aim for one concrete commitment. Who is one person in the congregation whose burden God is calling them to help carry this week, and what would that practically look like?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The eastern tribes as an example of solidarity over self-interest.
- Bearing one another's burdens in the body of Christ (Galatians 6:2).
- Counting others' interests as our own (Philippians 2:3–4).
- Refusing to let our own comfort excuse us from our brothers' struggles.
- Concrete, sacrificial love within the local congregation.

Discussion Prompts

- What is striking about the eastern tribes' willingness to fight when they already had their land?
- Where is your own comfort or settledness tempting you to step back from others' struggles?
- Who is one person in the church whose burden God is calling you to help carry this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

When the people answer Joshua, they say, "only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses," and they call for anyone who rebels against his commandment to be put to death

(Joshua 1:17–18). What does this reveal about the seriousness of submitting to God-appointed leadership and unity among God’s people, and how does the New Testament call the church to honor faithful leadership while keeping Christ as the true head (Hebrews 13:17; Ephesians 1:22–23)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. The people’s response, “only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses” and their call for death to any who rebel against Joshua’s command (Joshua 1:17–18), raises the question of God-appointed leadership and the submission of God’s people to it. Handle it with balance.

First, establish the principle the text teaches: God appoints leaders for His people, and faithfulness to God is expressed in honoring the leadership He has given. Israel’s unity and success depended on rallying behind the leader God had chosen. Rebellion against God’s appointed leader was, in that covenant context, rebellion against God Himself, which is why the penalty was so severe.

Then carry the principle carefully into the New Covenant. The church is to honor and submit to faithful leadership, elders who watch for souls (Hebrews 13:17), without turning that into the harsh, capital sanctions of the old order. The tone of the New Testament is honor, esteem in love, and willing submission, not coercion (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13). The church follows the New Testament pattern of qualified elders and faithful members, each serving in their place.

Crucially, keep Christ as the true head. Joshua, like Moses, was a servant pointing forward to a greater leader. Jesus Christ is the head of the church, His body (Ephesians 1:22–23; Colossians 1:18), and all human leadership is under His authority and His Word. Submission to leaders is never blind; it is submission to godly leaders precisely because they themselves submit to Christ and lead according to His Word. This guards against both rebellion and the abuse of authority.

Be careful not to import any sectarian or hierarchical distortion. The point is the unity of God’s people under God-given, Christ-centered, Scripture-bound leadership, not the elevation of any man.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s appointment of leaders for the good and unity of His people.
- The seriousness of submission to God-appointed leadership in the covenant community.
- The New Testament call to honor and submit to faithful elders (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).
- Christ as the true head of the church, over all human leadership (Ephesians 1:22–23; Colossians 1:18).
- Submission to leaders as submission to those who themselves submit to Christ and His Word.

- Guarding against both rebellion against godly leadership and the abuse of authority.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the people's response teach about the importance of unity under God-appointed leadership?
- How does the New Testament call us to honor faithful elders while keeping Christ as the true head of the church?
- Where do you struggle more, with submitting to godly leadership, or with keeping Christ above every human leader?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across this whole chapter, from the death of Moses to the people's pledge to follow, where is Jesus calling you to step across your own Jordan in trust rather than fear? Name one specific way the courage God commanded Joshua is the very thing Christ is forming in you right now.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to look back across the whole chapter and name where Christ is calling them to cross their own Jordan in trust rather than fear. Resist the urge to add new content; the work here is to gather up the lesson and make it personal and specific.

Remind students of the movement of the chapter: from the death of Moses and the fear it brought, through God's repeated command to be strong and courageous, grounded in His presence, to the people's wholehearted pledge to follow. The same God who carried Israel stands with them at their own threshold.

Help them name one specific Jordan, the real fear, decision, or calling in front of them, and one specific way the courage God commanded Joshua is the very thing Christ is forming in them. Keep it concrete; a vague resolution will evaporate by Monday.

Close by pointing to Christ. The courage God commands is finally possible because Jesus is with His people always, even to the end of the age. Encourage each person to take their next step trusting that presence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis of the chapter: from fear to courage grounded in God's presence.
- Naming one specific threshold God is calling the student to cross.
- Courage as something Christ actively forms in the believer.
- The presence of Christ as the ground of obedient courage today (Matthew 28:20).
- Concrete, personal application rather than vague resolve.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one Jordan God is calling you to cross right now?
- Where have you seen Christ growing courage in you through fear rather than removing the fear?
- What is one specific step of trusting obedience you will take this week?