

How can I be Strong?

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:9

This verse is an encouragement for many and a welcome reminder that God is always with us. “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go” is a comfort to many facing dark times and an uncertain future. The Bible is loaded with promises that God will never leave us or forsake us. Many times in my life I have remembered these promises and been encouraged that God is with me.

This verse is part of the first address that Joshua makes to the people of Israel after Moses’ death. In this address Joshua reminds the Israelites of God’s promises and tells them that they are to go into the Promised Land. He tells them that nothing will stand in their way and that God himself will go with them. Joshua reiterates the promises of God to Moses and the Israelites and he reminds them to keep the book of the law. Joshua 1:8 is that famous verse that commands the Israelites to meditate on the law day and night. This verse is often used as an implied command to memorize Scripture.

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 good success.

How can you meditate on God’s word day and night if you don’t have it memorized? The interesting thing is that Joshua is here linking meditating on Scripture with being strong and courageous. If we split apart the verses we miss this important truth, but remember that in the original document there was no chapter and verses, so to understand the verse you need to read it in the context of the rest of the passage. Splitting apart the verses is like reading just one sentence from a paragraph – it is nearly impossible to understand the meaning. Let’s read both verses together and see the connection.

“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 good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

See the connection? Being strong and courageous, remembering that God comes with us wherever we go only comes from a life that is spent meditating on Scripture. The only way we can rest in the mighty hand of God is if we are focusing on His promises and His Law in scripture. To put it another way, it is impossible to be strong and courageous if we are relying on our own power and strength. The children of Israel were going to be asked to do impossible things. The conquering of the nations in the Promised Land would be impossible for this band of desert wanderers, but with God’s help they could accomplish the impossible.

Today we face many Jericho in our lives. They may not seem like the glamorous battles that the nation of Israel fought, but they are just as real. Our Jericho’s often look like battles with many forms of sin such as pride, selfishness, anger, or materialism. We struggle with these as if our lives depended on it, and we sometimes have victory, and sometimes suffer defeat. The mighty nation of Israel conquered Ai and was almost undone by the hand of a single man who struggled with greed. Achan wanted for himself what God told them to destroy and the entire nation suffered defeat. Sin ultimately destroyed the nation of Israel, and it tries to destroy us too, but God sent his Son into the world to pay the price for our sin and to conquer our sin. We can overcome the grip of sin in our lives by meditating on Scripture and hiding it in our hearts. When we are filled with Scripture, and we care meditating on it day and night then we **will** be, *“...strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”*

English Standard Version (ESV)

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