

MinistryPlace.net

The Day of Atonement

Scripture: Leviticus 16:1-34

Theme: Sin requires a sacrifice -- and God provides it

High School (Ages 15-18)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

"Courage in Faith: Joshua's Call to Trust God's Leadership" This lesson explores Joshua 1:1, 9, where God's command, "Be strong and courageous" (v. 6), reveals a deeper truth: divine courage isn't just about fearlessness but faithful obedience to God's sovereignty. For high schoolers, the tension between human ambition and divine initiative forces us to ask: How does God's presence shape our own courage? The real-world application? Volunteers can reflect on how their "promised land" (e.g., personal mission, ministry) is secured by God's promise, not their own strength. The lesson ends with discussion: Where do we cling to God's guidance when fear lingers?

Bible Story

"Be Strong and Courageous: Joshua's Call to Faith" (A Study of Joshua 1:1-9 for High School Students)

After the death of Moses, God summoned Joshua, once a reluctant spy, now a leader of the Israelites, with a profound command: "Moses my servant is dead. Rise up, therefore, and cross this Jordan into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel to possess." (v. 2, ESV) These words weren't mere orders; they were an invitation to step into a role far beyond human capability. For the Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness for forty years, hardened by doubt, but God's promise of the Promised Land remained unbroken. Joshua, though still young, had spent years observing God's faithfulness, yet the challenge before him was immense: a people divided by fear, a border marked by impossible odds, and a land still inhabited by nations that would resist their advance. Yet God's instruction carried no hesitation. Why? Because He wasn't asking Joshua to achieve victory on his own merit but to trust His name (v. 3), to rely on God's power, not his own.

The command continued: "Arise, therefore, and go over the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of the Amorites, and to the Perizzites, to the Hittites, to the Jebusites, and to the Canaanites, and to all the nations of the hill countries in the land of Canaan." (v. 4) Here, God didn't sugarcoat the

task. The land was not empty, it was occupied by nations fortified by human strength, divine laws, and idolatry. For high schoolers grappling with skepticism or fear, this passage forces a crucial question: How do we respond to God's calling when the "Promised Land" feels like an impossible dream? Joshua's task wasn't just physical but spiritual: he must have faith that God would deliver them even when others would not. The Israelites' history had shown that God's people often failed where they lacked faith (e.g., Kadesh-barnea, Numbers 13:31), but God's covenant remained steadfast. For us today, this teaches that our faith isn't measured by circumstances but by our trust in God's character, a character revealed in His covenant promises (e.g., Genesis 17:7, "I will be your God").

God's words then shifted to Joshua's personal heart: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed... for I will be with you." (v. 6) The phrase "be strong and courageous" is often translated from Hebrew as "man up" in some contexts, but that diminishes its depth. In reality, it's an exhortation to dare courage in the face of fear, not because we're unbreakable, but because God is with us. The Israelites' fears had paralyzed them before; now, God was asking Joshua to act before they were certain. This mirrors real-life challenges where faith isn't a feeling but a choice to obey God's call anyway. For example, a student who fears failure in a project may hesitate, but if they choose to trust God's workmanship (1 Corinthians 1:30), their courage grows. Theologically, this verse connects to themes of shalom, God's intent for restoration and wholeness (Isaiah 58:12), which means the Promised Land wasn't just a physical inheritance but a place of reconciliation between God and His people.

The final verses of the passage highlight God's sovereignty: "Wherever you go, I will be with you; I will rescue you from all enemies on every side... Do not be afraid or terrified... for I am with you." (v. 7-9) God's promise wasn't just for Joshua but for all who would follow. This raises an important question: What does it mean to have God's presence in the face of opposition? For high schoolers, this could apply to facing bullies, academic pressures, or personal struggles. The Israelites' battles weren't won by their own strength but by God's faithfulness, something we see repeated in history (e.g., Joshua's victories after God's commands). God's presence isn't a guarantee of easy victory but a guarantee of justice. Even in defeat, God's character remains faithful (Romans 5:3-5). For us, this means that our courage isn't in our success but in our obedience, knowing God's promises endure.

Why does this story matter today? Joshua's call challenges us to ask: What is God asking us to step into that feels beyond our strength? Whether it's leading a worship team, standing up for justice, or trusting God in a season of doubt, Joshua's story reminds us that God's promises are not conditional on our performance. His strength is our foundation, and His presence our armor. For high schoolers, this isn't just about history, it's about realizing that God's promises for the "Promised Land" (which could be a life of purpose, community, or spiritual growth) are just as real as His promises to Joshua. The key is to dare to believe, even when fear whispers otherwise.

Key Verse

Leviticus 16:34

Simple yet profound explanation: Joshua 1:9 challenges us to embrace God's unshakable presence in our struggles, because faith isn't just about emotional courage but trusting His sovereignty. The call isn't to ignore fear (it's natural!), but to refuse to let it define us, knowing the Lord's strength is the only unchanging force in our lives. Theological connection: This echoes the Psalmist's trust in God's promises (e.g., Psalm 27:1) and shows how obedience isn't passive, it's an active alignment with His purpose, even in uncertainty. Real-world twist: Ever felt overwhelmed by doubt or doubt's whispers? The verse asks us to hold onto God's word over our fears, turning our focus inward, not to silence fear, but to find freedom in His faithfulness. Like a captain steering a ship through storms, courage isn't the absence of waves but the choice to trust the rudder.

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Divide & Debate (5 min):
2. Split the group into 3, 5-person teams. Assign each team one of the following questions to discuss:

3. Theological Question: "What does 'Be strong and courageous' (Joshua 1:9) mean theologically, not just 'don't be afraid'? How does this align with the idea of faith as an active choice (Hebrews 11:6) vs. passivity?"
4. Historical Question: "How does Joshua's leadership model contrast with Moses' leadership? What did God tell Joshua to do that Moses didn't?"
5. Modern Application: "Where in your life do you face 'walls' (fears, distractions, or opposition) like the Israelites? How can you 'take the book of the law' (Joshua 1:8) into those situations?"
6. Visualize the Doubt Wall (7 min):
7. Each team draws a "wall" on their poster (e.g., a rampart or a mountain of fear) using the paper. Inside the wall, they:
8. Write phrases from the Bible (e.g., Joshua 1:9, 1 Peter 5:7) or their own reflections on what "courage" actually looks like.
9. Add images (e.g., a sword for faith, a shield for protection, a book for God's Word).
10. Key Connection: Encourage them to contrast the "wall of doubt" with the call to "be strong and courageous", not to overcome fear by willpower alone, but by trusting God's promises (e.g., Hebrews 11:31: "By faith they passed through the Red Sea...").
11. Debate & Present (3 min):
12. Each team presents their "wall" and the theological/real-world takeaways they highlighted. Facilitate discussion:
13. What does it mean to "take the book of the law" (Joshua 1:8) in your own life?
14. How can fear and doubt be legitimate emotions (Galatians 5:17: "The flesh desires what is against the Spirit") while still requiring action?
15. Theological Hooks:
16. Faith vs. Fear: Joshua's courage wasn't absence of fear but obedience to God's call (1 John 4:18).
17. Legacy: The Israelites' struggle with the land mirrors modern "promised lands" (e.g., faith in God's plans despite failure or doubt).
18. Real-World Tie: Use the Bible as a "blueprint" (Joshua 1:8), not a recipe, but a promise to trust God's direction, even in uncertainty.

Activity 2:

1. Scouting Mission (3 min):
2. Each student gets a paper cup with a numbered "mission" (e.g., #1: "Find a place to rest before the battle," #2: "Identify the 'walls' in your path," #3: "Write down God's promises for this week").
3. They must "scout" the location (classroom or outdoor area) for 2 minutes to:
4. Locate a "Promised Land" spot (e.g., a safe corner).
5. Identify "trials" (e.g., a "river" to cross symbolically).
6. Draw a "map" of the area with chalk.
7. Team Briefing (4 min):
8. The group discusses: What does "Be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:9) look like in a "scouting mission"?
9. Assign roles (e.g., "Commander," "Scout," "Prayer Leader") and give them 1 minute to prepare a "mission plan" based on their map and Bible verse.
10. Key Question: "How does preparation (studying the land and God's Word) differ from execution (actually moving forward)?"
11. The Battle (6 min):
12. Teams perform their "mission" under these constraints:
13. No talking (symbolizing silence before action).
14. One person speaks first, then the rest follow in order (symbolizing Joshua's delegation).

15. If they encounter a "wall" (e.g., a chalked "impossible" line), they must:
16. Pray aloud (1 minute).
17. Take one step forward without looking back (symbolizing courage).
18. After completing, they write a "mission report" (1 sentence) on why they chose their approach.
19. Reflection & Debate (2 min):
20. Facilitate discussion:
21. What was easier: planning or executing? Why?
22. How does Joshua's faith in God's promises (e.g., "I will never leave you") (Deuteronomy 31:6) inform your own courage?
23. What "mission" (real-life challenge) do you need to "scout" and act on this week?
24. Theological Connections:
25. Discipline of Faith: Joshua's preparation (Joshua 1:8) mirrors modern "spiritual formation" (e.g., daily prayer, Bible study).
26. Trust vs. Control: The Israelites' fear of the Canaanites reflects modern anxiety about "failure" or "not measuring up." Joshua's courage was trusting God's already-promise (not their own strength).
27. Real-World Link: Use the activity to discuss how God's promises are not just for the past (Joshua's generation) but for our future battles (e.g., perseverance in school, faith in God's timing).
28. Why These Work:

Discussion Questions

- Here are four intellectually engaging, open-ended discussion questions designed to provoke thoughtful reflection on Joshua 1:1, 9, its theological depth, and real-world applications for high school students:
- 1. Courage in Uncertainty: Faith vs. Fear
 - "Joshua is given a direct command: 'Be strong and courageous.' Yet, throughout the book of Joshua, his people face overwhelming obstacles, unnatural battles, divine tests, and the challenge of occupying a land they've never fully understood. The command isn't given to Joshua alone but to everyone in Israel (v. 7). What might this command mean for someone who feels their own faith is small, their own courage fleeting, or their own circumstances too vast to tackle? How do you think Joshua's people were supposed to respond when fear crept in, especially when the odds seemed impossible?"
 - (Theological angle: Discuss how God's command echoes Psalm 23:3 ("Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death"), how does courage in faith look like in moments of doubt? Real-world: Relate to students' fears in school, relationships, or future planning.)
- 2. Divine Promise and Human Responsibility
 - "God tells Joshua, 'I will not leave you or forsake you' (v. 5). This is a promise of divine presence, protection, and even victory, yet the story of Joshua's conquest is rife with human failure. Think about the times when God's people disobeyed (e.g., the golden calf, the failed spies, the failure to take Jericho properly). How might Joshua's leadership have been different if he had to deal with recurring rebellion? If God's promise is unconditional, why do we often see Israel's failures in the narrative? What does this say about the tension between divine sovereignty and human agency?"
 - (Theological angle: Explore the implication of God's promises, how do we reconcile grace with accountability? Real-world: Analyze modern conflicts where "divine promises" (e.g., justice, prosperity) seem unfulfilled. How do students navigate their own faith in imperfect systems?)
- 3. Legacy and the Weight of Expectation
 - "Joshua's charge isn't just personal, it's generational. He's called to lead Israel into the Promised Land, but the real work of the faith he's handed down would fall to future leaders. The book of Joshua itself is often read as the

'preamble' to the judges, where the cycle of sin and redemption begins. How might Joshua have felt about the burden of building a legacy that would later be abandoned? What does this say about the meaning of faith, not just in one's own lifetime, but in the lives of those who follow? Should we ask more of ourselves when we inherit a faith tradition?"

- (Theological angle: Connect to the Shema ("Hear, O Israel...") and the idea of passing down faith. Real-world: Discuss how students might feel about the expectations placed on them by family, culture, or their own communities, what does "building a legacy" look like today?)
- 4. The "Land" of Ourselves: What Does Conquest Really Mean?
 - "The Promised Land in Joshua isn't just a physical territory, it's also a metaphor for freedom from oppression, fulfillment of destiny, or even the 'land' of one's deepest desires. But conquest isn't always easy. The Israelites' victory comes through obedience to God's laws (e.g., the Sabbath, the Levitical system) and through trusting in Him even when they don't see the path. What does it mean to 'take the land' today? For example: Is it conquering societal norms, personal struggles, or even the 'cultural landmines' of modern identity? How do students imagine their own 'Promised Land', what must they 'take' to claim it?"
 - (Theological angle: Reflect on Deuteronomy 11:13, 21 (consequences of obeying/ disobeying God) and Matthew 5:5 ("Blessed are the peacemakers"). Real-world: Discuss how justice, creativity, or mental health can be "lands" to claim, and what risks come with it.)
- Follow-Up Suggestions for Discussion:
 - Pair these with small-group activities (e.g., sketching "what they need to conquer" or writing a letter to Joshua asking for advice).
 - Connect to current events: Is there a modern "Joshua moment" (e.g., climate change, technological disruption) where courage and faith are tested?
 - Challenge students to identify a "Promised Land" in their own lives and brainstorm how to "conquer" the fears or obstacles in front of them.
 - These questions encourage students to engage with the text as both a historical account and a spiritual challenge, inviting them to wrestle with big questions while grounding them in biblical truth.

Prayer Focus

*"Lord, You called Joshua, an ordinary man with a vision of the land You promised, to lead His people into a land they could not conquer with their own strength. Teach us, as students and citizens of Your kingdom, to face our challenges with the same unshaken faith and courage You gave Joshua: not through our own cleverness or force, but through the wisdom of Your Word, the strength of Your Spirit, and the courage to trust You in every step. May we study with diligence, serve with integrity, and live with the boldness of those who know You are the One who makes us strong, so that our lives, like Joshua's, may reflect Your faithfulness, not our own achievements."
(Connects theological truth to intellectual honesty, acknowledging Joshua's human limitations while affirming God's sovereignty, and applying it to academic and moral integrity.)*

>> Missions Spotlight

The Karenni people of Myanmar have been displaced from their homeland for decades. Missionaries working in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border share Joshua's story to encourage displaced believers that God keeps His promises even in exile.

-> To the Cross

God told Joshua, 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.' God always keeps His promises. Jesus gives us an even greater promise: 'Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28:20). Our true Promised Land is eternal life with Him.