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The Day of Atonement

Scripture: Leviticus 16:1-34

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

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: "God's Courage Gives Us Courage" Joshua 1:1-9 Hook: Imagine you're standing at the edge of a huge, scary battle, like the walls of Jericho, knowing God's already promised to win, but you're still trembling. That's exactly where Joshua and his people were when God called them to take the Promised Land. God didn't just give them a map or a list of rules; He personally said, "Be strong and courageous, for I will be with you" (v. 9). The real question is: Do we believe God's promises today, when we're facing fears big or small? Application: Life isn't always about having perfect courage; it's about trusting God's strength through our own. Whether it's quitting an unhealthy habit, standing up for what's right, or just showing up when you're tired, God's promise is the same: He'll be with us. The challenge? Ask Him to help us see courage not as bravery, but as obedience, knowing He's already won. End with a quick reflection: "Where am I feeling scared right now? What's one small step God could help me take today?"

Bible Story

Joshua and the Promise: Be Strong and Courageous

The sun was setting over the edge of the Jordan River as Moses stood on the far bank, looking back at his people. The Israelites had crossed the river just a few days earlier, leaving behind the desert and the wilderness where they had spent forty years waiting for God's promise. Now, they stood on the other side, ready to enter the land God had given them as their home. But Moses knew the Israelites were nervous, what if they failed? What if the people who lived there, like the Canaanites, resisted? The Bible tells us that God spoke to Moses one last time, saying, "This is my command to you: Be strong and courageous. I will be with you; never will I leave you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:9) Moses passed on this same message to Joshua, who had been his assistant for years. Joshua, a young man who had grown up watching God work, stepped forward with a bold declaration: "Let's go!"

Joshua knew this wasn't just about crossing a river or taking over a city. It was about trusting God for everything. The people of Israel had already seen God move in the past, parting the Red Sea, feeding them with manna, leading them through the wilderness. But now, the biggest challenge was ahead: the land was full of giants (as Joshua would later say), and the enemies were strong. Joshua didn't have a sword or a shield in his own hands, but he had God's promise. He told the Israelites, "Follow me, and I'll go before you into the land I promise to give you." He wasn't asking them to be brave by themselves, he was inviting them to believe God would lead them, protect them, and give them victory.

The people's fear didn't disappear overnight, but Joshua's words planted a seed of hope. God had promised them this land for generations, and now, it was time to step forward. The Israelites camped near the Jordan, and for the first time in decades, they felt the weight of their future in their hands, not because they were strong, but because they were with God. Joshua didn't just give them a mission; he gave them a relationship. He told them, "Do not be afraid; I have taken away all your enemies." His words were simple, but they carried the weight of God's promise.

Years later, when the Israelites finally entered the land and faced real battles, they would need to remember Joshua's words. They would need to be strong and courageous, not because they were perfect, but because they trusted God to be with them. Just like Joshua, they were called to take the first step, even when it felt scary. The Bible doesn't say the Israelites were always brave, but it does say that when they turned to God, He led them. That's the same truth we have today: God doesn't call us to be perfect, but He does call us to step forward in faith, trusting that He'll be with us every step of the way.

This story reminds us that God's promises aren't just for the past, they're for our future too. Whether we're facing big challenges or small ones, Joshua's lesson is simple: We don't have to carry the weight alone. God has given us His strength, His courage, and His promise to walk with us. So when we feel afraid, we can ask ourselves: Will I trust God like Joshua did? The answer isn't always easy, but when we do, we discover that the greatest adventure isn't about how brave we are, it's about how much we believe God will lead us.

Key Verse

Leviticus 16:34

Verse Breakdown: Joshua 1:9 , "Be Strong and Courageous!" Imagine you're standing at the edge of a big, scary challenge, maybe a big test, a tough decision, or even a fight with a friend. The Bible says: "Don't shrink back or give up just because it feels hard! God is with you, cheering you on, and He's got your back, no matter what!" This isn't about being brave without fear, it's about trusting that God is stronger than your doubts and will never leave you alone. So when life knocks, remember: He's the One who holds your hand. (And He doesn't stop until you do!) Real Question? "But what if I fail?" Answer: "Even when you stumble, God won't give up on you. He'll pick you back up and say, 'Keep going!'" (Like when you fell down at recess, did you quit? Probably not... and neither should you!) Life App? Try this: When you're nervous about something, whisper "God's with me" to yourself, then take one small step. Courage isn't the absence of fear; it's acting despite it.

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Divide the group into 3, 4 teams of 3, 5 students.
2. Explain that each team will be given a "mission" to complete, just like Joshua received orders from God.
3. Set up 3, 4 "missions" around the room:
4. Mission 1: The "Cross the Jordan" Bridge (Cardboard bridge made from two boxes taped together)
5. Teams must cross the bridge without falling (or use a soft mat if needed).
6. Connect to Joshua 1:3: "You will cross the Jordan and go into the land."
7. Mission 2: The "Caught in the Desert" Obstacle Course (Scattered items to find: a "promised land" map, a water bottle, a piece of paper with God's word written on it)

8. Teams must retrieve all items before time runs out.
9. Connect to Joshua 1:6: "Be strong and courageous."
10. Mission 3: The "Faith Test" (Team Charades or Bible Verse Recall)
11. One student from each team acts out Joshua's key actions (e.g., leading the way, trusting God), while others guess.
12. Alternative: Quick-fire Bible verse recall of Joshua 1:1-9.
13. Connect to Joshua 1:9: "This is my command."
14. Assign each team a mission and give them 2, 3 minutes to prepare.
15. Have them pray together before starting, asking God for courage like Joshua did.
16. Time each team's mission and declare the winner with a cheer.
17. Discuss: Why did Joshua need faith to succeed? How can we trust God like Joshua in our own lives?

Activity 2:

1. Explain the concept:
2. Joshua didn't just inherit the land, he believed God's promises. Today, we can "inhere" God's promises in our own lives through faith.
3. Ask: What does "the promised land" look like to you? A better future? Overcoming fear? Closer relationship with God?
4. Guide the creation:
5. Give each student or team 10, 15 minutes to create a vision board.
6. Example prompts:
7. "What would my life look like if I trusted God like Joshua?"
8. "What challenges do I need to 'cross the Jordan' in?"
9. "How can I be a leader in my own 'promised land'?"
10. Provide cut-out images of mountains, water, cities, or faith symbols, or let them draw directly.
11. Share and discuss (5, 7 minutes):
12. Have each student present one element of their board and explain why it matters.
13. Example: "I added a sword because Joshua needed courage to fight. I need courage to stand up for what's right."
14. Connect to Joshua 1:9: "This is my command: Be strong and courageous!"
15. Ask: What's one promise from Joshua's story you want to claim for yourself today?
16. Why These Work for Junior High:
17. Engagement: The "Joshua Challenge" keeps energy high with movement and teamwork; the vision board is personal and creative.
18. Honesty: Both activities invite students to reflect on fear, trust, and leadership, topics that resonate with their struggles.
19. Life Application: The challenges tie directly to real-life faith questions: How do we stay strong when afraid? How do we lead others?
20. Cost-Effective: Uses basic materials and minimal prep.
21. Would you like adjustments for a specific focus (e.g., more prayer integration, more scripture emphasis)?

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to spark meaningful reflection for junior high students (ages 12, 14), blending biblical principles from Joshua and practical life applications:

- Fear vs. Faith: What's Your First Reaction?
- When Joshua received God's command to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, he wasn't the only one afraid, everyone was! In Joshua 1:8, 9, God tells him to be strong and courageous because He had already given the land to them. If you were in Joshua's shoes, what would your first thought be when faced with something big, like trying a new sport, standing up for someone, or starting a new challenge? How could God's promise to Joshua (that He'd be with them) apply to your fears today? Think of a time you felt small or overwhelmed, what helped you take that first step?
- (This question invites students to examine their own emotional responses and explore how God's strength can empower them, even in scary situations.)
- Promises Left Unclaimed: What's Holding You Back?
- Joshua 1:7, 9 says God wants us to obey His commands because He's already given us the tools to succeed. For example, if someone asked you to jump into a cold lake, you might say, "No way!" But then you'd look at the water, realize it's only 65°F, and still hesitate. That hesitation is like the Israelites' hesitation, they knew God promised the land, but they didn't trust it fully yet. If there's a promise God has put in your heart (academic, spiritual, personal), but you've been procrastinating or doubting, what's the one thing that's making it hard to take that first step? How could God's strength help you claim it?
- (This question connects to real-life struggles like procrastination, self-doubt, or avoiding hard choices, helping students see how Joshua's story mirrors their own battles.)
- The "Why" Behind the Command: Why Does God Want Us to Be Strong?
- Joshua 1:6 says God wants us to be strong and courageous because He's already given us the land, and the heart to claim it. But what does that really mean? Think of a time when you felt brave but didn't actually do it, or when you failed at something big. Why do you think God's commands aren't just about not failing, but about choosing to trust Him anyway? How can we honor God when our own strength feels weakest?
- (This question digs into the heart of faith, why courage isn't just about being fearless, but about choosing to trust God even when we're not ready. It ties into real-life temptations like quitting, giving up, or hiding our doubts.)
- Legacy: How Will You Be Strong?
- At the end of Joshua 1, God says He'll never leave the Israelites or forsake them. That promise was meant to last forever, but how? Joshua led them into the Promised Land, but what about after? If you were Joshua, what's one thing you'd want to pass down to the next generation, like a story, a lesson, or even just a reminder of God's faithfulness? How can you be a generation that trusts God enough to take the next step, no matter how big or small?
- (This question encourages students to reflect on legacy, how their faith, courage, or obedience today shapes their impact on future generations. It's a great tie-back to the idea that "be strong and courageous" isn't just for today, but for everything that comes after.)
- Why These Work:
- Engaging & Honest: No clichs, just real questions about fears, doubts, and choices.
- Life-Applicable: Each ties back to struggles students face (academics, friendships, identity, etc.).
- Encourages Prayer/Reflection: Open-ended answers let students share their own stories or prayer requests.
- Biblical + Personal: Combines the story's themes (God's faithfulness, trust, obedience) with modern life.
- Would you like any of these adapted for a specific group (e.g., more focus on teamwork, fear of failure, or spiritual growth)?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus for Junior High Students: "Be Strong and Courageous" [Teacher begins by sharing the story of Joshua standing before the Israelites at the edge of the Promised Land. He asks: "What would you have done if you were Joshua? Would you have felt afraid, or brave? Today, God calls us to be strong in our own way, just like Joshua was."] Prayer: "Lord, we're just kids, sometimes our hearts feel scared or unsure, like Joshua and his people were when they stood at the edge of this big, unknown land. But You promised to go with us, to be our strength. Help us today to trust You more than our own courage. Give us the faith to believe You'll lead us, the courage to step forward even when things feel overwhelming, and the heart to remember that You're with us, always. When we feel afraid, remind us: You didn't just promise to be with us, You promised to be with us. Amen." Life Application Tie-In: "This isn't just about the past, it's about right now. Joshua wasn't given a perfect life, but God gave him one thing: His Word. He told him to 'Be strong and courageous' because Joshua already had courage, he had God's promise. So today, we ask: What's the 'Promised Land' we're standing at? Is it a fear, a big decision, or just feeling small? God's not asking us to be perfect, He's asking us to believe He'll see us through."

>> 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.