

FORWARD

Week One | January 7, 2018 | Moving Forward in Our Faith, Part 1

PREPARATION

GETTING READY:

Before your group meets next, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through Joshua 1:1–9. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truths of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

No matter what new season or transition we face, we can move forward in faith as we rely on God's control, God's presence, and God's Word.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

When we trust in God's control, God's presence, and God's Word, we face new transitions in a godly and faithful way. When we don't trust in these things, we will either assimilate to the new culture we find ourselves in or isolate from it in fear.

MEDITATE

"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)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

- 🕒: *Why do you think people make resolutions as they move forward into each new year?*
- 🕒: *What kind of motivations do non-Christians rely on to move forward into a new year with confidence? Alternatively, where do Christians find the strength to move forward into each new year with faith and courage?*
- 🕒: *Think through the various seasons of your life. When moving into a big transition, how does God usually prepare you?*

We've all seen movies that take place in outer space. While the plotlines differ slightly, one thing is true about all of them. For the astronauts or space travelers to enter into the new, strange, and foreign space environment, they have to prepare with a few essential tools. They need a space suit and some form of oxygen. They also need to understand the rules, whether that's how the spaceship operates or specific ways to eat, exercise, and sleep in an environment that is totally different than what they are used to. And they need communication with someone from their own world—the space station back on earth, or some expert in control on the other side, guiding them through their mission. To be alone in a foreign place like outer space would be terrifying, miserable, and mind-bending, making one forget which side is up or down. Having the virtual presence of someone on the other side makes all the difference. Without that lifeline, a space traveler would never make it.

As we look at Joshua 1, we can find some similarities in the story of Israel. The people have been living one particular way for a long time. They are about to enter into a totally different environment, a place and culture called “Canaan” that is completely foreign to them. Before they enter in this new world, so to speak, God prepares them with some essential tools. We will see in this week's passage that the Lord equips them for the mission, giving them various things to help them make it through this strange new transition.

Like space travelers, they will be equipped with someone on the “other side” who is in control of the entire operation, telling them what to do. They will be given the comforting presence they need so they do not lose sight of who they are or the realities of right and wrong. And finally, they will be given the “rules” that will keep them healthy as a people and provide the direction they need to make it as a people in this transitional time.

- 🕒: *Have you ever experienced “culture shock” when entering a new place? What was it like?*

Q: *In what ways do you think our culture impacts us without us knowing it? How do you think God has equipped us to follow Him instead of the culture?*

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In this series, we are learning how to “move forward” in various ways. This week (and next), we will learn how to move forward in faith. By studying Joshua 1:1–9, we will see the ways God prepared His people to continue in faith, even during a very difficult and transitional season. At this point in their journey, they are freed from Egypt. Enough years have passed for Egyptian cultural norms to fade among them, since they’ve been wandering in the wilderness for about forty years. In that time, they have developed their own norms and ways of doing life. However, they are about to enter an entirely different culture. Knowing they will struggle to remember the Lord and remember who they are, God equips them before they transition into Canaan. In this passage, we will see three ways we can continue in faith:

- 1. WE MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH BECAUSE OF GOD’S CONTROL**
- 2. WE MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH BECAUSE OF GOD’S PRESENCE**
- 3. WE MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH BECAUSE OF GOD’S WORD**

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God’s Word says about this week’s particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week’s biblical truth.

WE MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH BECAUSE OF GOD’S CONTROL

▣ JOSHUA 1:1–4

As we open the book of Joshua, we see the dawn of a brand new season for Israel. Generations before, God had promised Abraham that His people would be a great blessing, they would become a great nation, and one day they’d have a land of their own. As the years passed, God reiterated this promise to Abraham’s son, Isaac, and repeated it

yet again to Jacob, his grandson (Gen. 12:1–3, 26:2–4, 28:13–15).

As the people grew and time went on, many highs and lows filled the history of Israel, eventually landing them in foreign oppression. After years of slavery in Egypt, they were delivered by God’s powerful hand through their leader, Moses. After their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, they ended up wandering in the wilderness for forty years, eating the manna and quail and drinking the water God provided for them along the way.

Once Moses died, the people had likely all but forgotten God was still at work among them, making plans to fulfill His promises. They were lost, it seemed, wandering forever. They were tired, walking endlessly, it felt like. They had the Law and a portable version of a temple, yes; but they were constantly setting up and tearing down, feeling homeless as they tried their best to be a “chosen people” without a proper homeland.

At just the right time, God gives the people a new leader and a new season—ones dedicated to giving them the land and the home they had waited for so long.

The new leader’s name was Joshua, Moses’ apprentice. Though the people were surely excited to finally receive this homeland they had been promised generations before, they were also nervous as they approached the foreign land of Canaan. After all, foreign lands hadn’t been so great to them in the past. They were accustomed to a certain way of doing things, and Canaan did things differently. They were used to traveling in portable tents, instead of staying put in strong houses. They were used to two items of food, not a whole city’s worth of eats. They had their own tribal celebrations and laws as the people of God, and Canaan had all sorts of strange, pagan ways. And since God had provided food and water for them, they had likely forgotten how to cook!

As they peered into this new season, though excited, they likely felt out of their league. “How are we going to move forward into this after doing life one way for forty years? What are we supposed to do with the Canaanites who live there? How are we supposed to walk in faith with such an unknown season in front of us?” They are looking down the barrel of something we all have faced at some point in our lives—massive transition. In this season of transition God speaks to Joshua, giving him instruction and comfort so the people can have great faith as they move forward.

🕒: *In what ways do you feel like Israel, facing a totally new transition?*

🕒: *Looking at the verses, who does the land belong to?*

Q: *What specific things does this passage show God has control over?*

As God steps in to help Israel learn how to move forward, He starts by assuring Joshua of His total control. First, He had already shown His sovereignty over Israel's leadership. He had chosen Moses Himself. He had also chosen Joshua as Moses' successor. As He gives Joshua clear instructions, it's obvious God has not changed His mind on the leader He desires to move these people forward.

Second, God shows His control over all places. The various cultures surrounding Israel at the time considered gods to be territorial. Some, they thought, had jurisdiction over certain people groups, certain areas of land or water, or certain human circumstances like fertility or financial success. Throughout the Old Testament, to contrast Himself with false gods, God consistently proves Himself to be the God over all, especially over every physical place. He has no boundary lines. His jurisdiction is the entire earth. Here, God is proving that point yet again.

We note that God tells Joshua to lead the people over the Jordan, into the "land" (verse 2). He immediately tells us that this land is something He is giving. This means that the land belongs to Him. While the Canaanites inhabit it at the moment, the land is God's, and He will give it to whomever He desires. Their false gods have no say or authority in the matter.

Next, we see that, while God could have stopped at saying He owned the land, He instead goes into detail about it. In verse 4, He assures Joshua of His control over both the land areas (whether that's the wilderness, the region of Lebanon, or the land of the Hittites) and the water areas (the large rivers, the Euphrates itself, and the Great Sea). He promises that "every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon" is given to him by God and God alone (v. 3). The people can walk forward in faith because every square inch of this place belongs to the Lord, and in His total control and faithfulness, He has decided to give this land to them. His words prove that He does not rule the land in a generic, half-hearted, far-off way. He is intimately familiar with it, ruling over every detail.

This moment reminds us of when Jesus helps His disciples have faith moving forward, trusting in God's control over not just people or animals in general, but over every strand of hair on our heads and every individual sparrow that falls to the ground (Matthew 10:26–31). Like Israel, we too can move forward in faith as we face each new season, trusting that God is in control over every little detail we encounter.

- ❖ *Though we know that God has control over every situation we will walk into, why do you think we often struggle to believe this day to day?*
- ❖ *In the moments you forget to find strength in God's ultimate control over your life, where do you usually run for motivation to keep going? How has this source of strength failed you in ways God has not?*
- ❖ *God saw the transition His people were facing and stopped to speak to them about it, giving them comfort and instruction. How does this encourage you as you face new transitions and seasons in life?*
- ❖ *If you rested in God's total control as you move forward into each day, how would your friendships or family relationships change? How would your view of work, school, or finances change as well?*

WE MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH BECAUSE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

❖ **JOSHUA 1:5–6, 9**

- ❖ *What's the difference in God's presence among believers in the Old and New Testaments? Why was it valuable to know that God's presence was with Israel at this time?*
- ❖ *In what particular way does God say He is with Joshua? (v. 5) Why do you think God includes this detail?*

Now that Joshua knows God is in total control of all the people and places associated with Israel's entrance into Canaan, the Lord gives him another reason to move forward in faith—the power of His presence. Joshua has many tasks ahead of him as Israel's leader, and transitioning them through this time will not be easy.

To reassure both Joshua and the people, God reminds them of an incredible reality. The same God who rules all people and places is with them and in a very particular way. God tells Joshua that He is with him, “just as I was with Moses.” The same divine presence that empowered Moses to split the Red Sea, crack open the rock, and lead the people into deliverance was now empowering Joshua and the people. God is promising that He is still willing and able to lead these people into Canaan by His strength and authority, in the same ways He has helped them before. Instead of being far off and instructing them to go at this new season alone, God reminds the people that He is still with them, and they can trust in His company. His strong and comforting presence will equip them to move forward into this new and unknown season of life.

🕒: *When you face a new or nerve-wracking season of life, whose presence do you usually run to? Why?*

🕒: *Why is having someone’s presence with us so comforting when we face the unknown?*

Next, God builds upon His promise. While it’s truly remarkable that He promises to be present with the people during this time, He adds even more to it by saying that He won’t leave or forsake them. His presence is not just there, it’s abiding. It’s not going anywhere. It will remain. They don’t have to wake up the next morning wondering if God changed His mind about sticking by their side. God is comforting His people during a scary season by assuring them He won’t abandon them. His presence is staying with them, period!

Knowing now of God’s control and presence, it makes perfect sense that Joshua is instructed to be “strong and courageous.” After all, if the God of the universe has the outcomes already planned, and empowers every moment with His very real and powerful presence, how could Israel not be brave? Just as a child on a diving board knows his father is in the water to catch him, Israel now has no reason to fear jumping into this transition into Canaan. Their God is right there, with them, controlling every external threat as well as every step they take.

We too can be strong and courageous as we face a new year with various highs and lows, trusting that God is not just with us as He was in the Old Testament, but in us through His Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:14)! Just as He promised Israel, He promises us that He will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and this knowledge can lead us to step out in faith as we move forward into uncharted territory.

- Q: *Share about a time you stepped out in faith due to your trust that God was in control and present with you.*
- Q: *How would your life look different this year if you truly believed God's presence was not just with you, but in you?*

WE MOVE FORWARD IN FAITH BECAUSE OF GOD'S WORD

■ JOSHUA 1:7-8

- Q: *Given the land and the people they are about to engage with in Canaan, why do you think Israel needs to be reminded of their various laws and identity as a people?*
- Q: *Following God's Word brings what?*
- Q: *How does the world define "success"? How does that contrast with the biblical view of success?*

After making His control and presence known to Israel, God gives them one final thing, His Word, to ground their faith so that they can move forward in confidence. The Lord reminds Joshua that he and the people need to be "very careful to do according to the Law" He had originally given through Moses (v.7). The timing here is important. The people had gotten used to life as an isolated people group. They were used to their own stories, their own norms, their own customs, their own food, and their own ways of doing travel and worship. But they were about to enter a land drastically different from all they were used to.

Where life had been somewhat simple, it was about to get very complex in Canaan and temptations would abound. While they were used to manna and quail, they would now see the delicacies of night-time restaurants, as it were. Where they had their own practices to worship Yahweh, they would now see pagan rituals for all sorts of gods. Where their kids grew up learning only Hebrew stories and values, they'd now meet people and see things that challenged everything they believed.

Canaan would be a culture shock, and God wanted to remind them exactly who they were and how they were supposed to act before they stumbled in this new place. They were God's people, and they did life according to His laws, not according to the customs of Canaan.

🗣️: *How often does God expect His people to engage with His Law?*

🗣️: *Why do you think God assumes they need His Word this frequently?*

In light of the culture shift they and their children were about to face, God instructs the people through Joshua to carefully obey the laws Moses has previously handed to them. He instructs them again to be “strong and courageous,” because keeping these laws would be far more difficult than it had been before now.

To emphasize the importance of keeping His Word, the Lord tells them that His Law should be both in their mouths and in their minds. He wants them not just to speak it daily to each other but to meditate on it. And then He goes further, saying how often these practices should happen (“day and night”). The result? Their ways would be successful and prosperous according to God.

While the world around them might not consider their lifestyle “successful” according to its standards, the people are promised that they will indeed be successful in the truest definition. They would please God and enjoy His provision for their lives if they obeyed. The same idea carries over to us today. As we enter into new seasons with new people and customs, we must put God's Word in front of us daily, speaking it to each other and meditating on it deeply.

What's most interesting about this story in Joshua is that God does not call the people to run away from a strange, worldly culture, but into it, as long as they are equipped with the right things, namely, God's control, presence, and Word. The same goes for us as we face various “cultures” around us, whether that be at work, in our neighborhoods, in local sports leagues, or in our schools. Instead of running away from those who don't know God, we run toward them in love. But we must ensure we are equipped for the temptations and challenges ahead. We, like Israel, can be strong, courageous, and faithful as we brave new environments if we trust in God's control, God's presence, and God's Word.

🗣️: *What keeps you from engaging with God's Word “day and night”?*

- ♀: *If your commitment to God's Word matched the instructions in this passage, how would that impact your family/friends? Your work life? Your church?*
- ♀: *Do you struggle more with isolating from ungodly culture (instead of ministering to it) or assimilating to ungodly culture (instead of living differently)? Why?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- ♀: *How can you remind yourself of God's total control over your life on a daily basis?*
- ♀: *How can you enjoy God's presence more in your weekly activities, especially when moving forward into the difficult or the unknown?*
- ♀: *Think about the barrier keeping you from engaging with God's Word daily. How can you overcome this barrier this week and onward? How can you show that God's Word is more valuable to you than anything else on your calendar?*
- ♀: *In what ways can you move forward into the various "cultures" around you in love, while remaining faithful to God?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- God, thank You for being in absolute control over all my life, including the small details. Help me trust that You are sovereign, even in big transitions.

- God, help me sense and enjoy Your presence in ways I have never experienced before. Let it give me the strength to move forward in faith.
- God, give me ideas to better prioritize Your Word in my daily life, so I can move forward in each day with strength and courage.
- God, help me engage with the culture around me in a way that is both loving to them and faithful to You.

COMMENTARY

JOSHUA 1:1 We are told that Joshua is the son of a man named “Nun.” All we know of Joshua’s father is that he is an Ephraimite (Numbers 13:8).

Joshua 1:1 God calls Moses “my servant,” a title of high honor. This phrase offers some foreshadowing, as Joshua would also be bestowed this title by God at the end of his life (Joshua 24:29).

JOSHUA 1:3 When God promises that “every place the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you,” the “your” and “you” are plural words in the original Hebrew. This tells us that the promises God is making are not just for Joshua but all Israel. While God is speaking to Joshua directly here, He is viewing Joshua as the representative leader of a whole people, thus the divine promises extend to them.

JOSHUA 1:7–8 It’s important to note that in the Old Testament “success” is almost never translated as financial prosperity. Instead, this phrase speaks of succeeding in life’s proper endeavors, which for the Israelites and for us, are holiness and obedience. In fact, the phrase “to be successful” shows up seventy-eight times in the Old Testament, and most commonly means to “have insight, have understanding, or be wise.” Also, “meditate” here is not in alignment with Eastern practices of emptying the mind, but rather, focusing the mind on God’s Word for extended periods of time and also taking time to speak it.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the New American Commentary.*

