

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



July 3, 2011

Be Strong and Courageous

Strength and courage are not exclusive to super-heroes. Anyone can possess these qualities — if we know where to go to find them.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

When Moses died, the mantle of leadership fell upon Joshua, his assistant. Throughout the wilderness journey, Joshua had proven to be a reliable and capable leader in his own right. He had led men in battle, and at the Kadesh Barnea disaster, he stood alone with Caleb insisting that Israel could take the land of Canaan. He knew a thing or two about courage.

But for all that, Joshua had always been in Moses' shadow. When the really big crises hit, it was Moses, not Joshua, who had to stand up to the challenges and make the tough decisions. Now that Moses was gone, Joshua had to carry the burden of leadership by himself.

In his heart, Joshua must have had some serious misgivings about this new role. This became quite apparent a short time later in his collapse of confidence following the setback at Ai (Josh. 7). Others must have noticed a hesitancy in

his demeanor, too. Before he died, Moses twice charged Joshua to “be strong and of good courage” (Deut. 31:7, 23). God used a similar phrase several times in his inaugural address to Joshua (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9). Even the people encouraged their new leader with the same language (Josh. 1:18). For a man who was accustomed to standing in the wings while someone else took the spotlight, having the eyes of the people now focused on him must have been a frightening experience. Could he do it?

Of course, we know how the story turned out. With the exception of the Ai incident, Joshua proved to be just as capable and wise a leader as his old mentor. Under his leadership, the Israelites took Canaan and established a stable and prosperous nation. Joshua found the courage he needed to do the job, and stood strong in the face of the many obstacles he encountered.

God's charge to Joshua is a fitting challenge to each of us today. There are many experiences in life that can cause us to be afraid or dismayed. Whatever our individual roles might be, we, like

Joshua, need to learn how to face our fears with strength and courage.

“Be strong and courageous” is a noble charge. But how do we develop these character traits?

Notice that God linked strength and courage to two conditions. First, He leads with the rhetorical question, “Have I not commanded you?” Strength and courage are not merely fruits of a well-developed positive mental attitude; they are rooted in a deep respect for and adherence to God's word. It is the knowledge that our feet are planted on solid ground that gives us the confidence to take on the world.

Second, God assured Joshua that “the Lord God is with you wherever you go.” God stands beside us as an invisible companion, a steady source of encouragement. This, too, is a function of His word, through the many promises He has given us of His protection and future reward. It's easier to face your fears when you know God has your back.

Where do strength and courage come from? They are the natural fruit of faith in God and His word.

— David King