

First Light

Caps, gowns, speeches, celebrations, hugs, photos. This time of year is a rite of passage for thousands of graduates from kindergarten to college and from coast to coast. The cheers and the tears of loved ones mix to create a portrait of these special moments in the lives of the graduating students.

Milestones like this are markers in the timeline of a person's life, often with family and friends surrounding to help etch it in the stone of history. These hours of celebration can also make one a little nervous as the next phase in life becomes alarmingly apparent. That next chapter which seemed to be so many miles away is now opened at your feet, awaiting your turn of the page of the future.

As Joshua stood near the Jordan River, hundreds of thousands of Israelites awaited his word. The funeral of the greatest leader in their nation's history had culminated in a month-long mourning ritual and the next step seemed to be uncertain to this growing multitude of Moses' disciples. It's hard to imagine the weight that Joshua felt in carrying this nation on his shoulders, as he also tried to fill the shoes of the man that spoke to God face to face (Deut. 34:10). As he musters his courage to accept the new leadership role placed in his hands and as he considers this ominous responsibility, Joshua listened. Milestone moments are good opportunities to make changes and plan out new directions, but careful preparation is paramount for a chapter change of this magnitude, so Joshua allows time to listen to the God who spoke so often to his humble friend and mentor.

Joshua 1:6-8

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua hears the graduation speech from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who commissioned him to a mindset of strength, courage, obedience, and trust. In these brief verses, God gives Joshua a motivating message, sound advice, and an eternal promise.

Maybe we can also listen in on God's commencement speech for Joshua. We need the same strength and courage that he was told he had. Perhaps our mountains seem equally high and treacherous to us. God summons Joshua's mind and his heart to be strong and very courageous; to face the next giant and those words are in place today for each of us. Recite that admonition to Joshua again and see if there starts to be a bit more purpose in your day. Listen to what God is saying – be strong, be courageous, be obedient, don't be afraid, don't be discouraged. Great thoughts for any graduate, or for anyone trying to serve the living God.