



Words

TO LIVE BY

Courage

AUGUST 2021

COURAGE

Definition: *mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.*

Along with the dictionary's definition for courage I want to add a few more words to take it further. This will help in understanding where you are going this month and what that will look like in choosing to live by the word courage.

Courage: *trusting God when God is entrusting you.*

To entrust something to someone means to: *assign the responsibility for doing something to (someone).* This is another way I'm defining what courage means for a follower of Jesus.

I was 23 years old with my firstborn and still getting used to what married life looked like when my husband was asked by the elders of our church to take on the role of Senior Pastor. I immediately went into panic mode inside my head trying to give God all the reasons why this would not be a good idea.

I was ok with being a youth/worship pastor's wife because that job seemed less stressful and allowed for more fun without a lot of pressure put on you. Growing up I had created in my head a false idea of what a pastor's wife needed to look and act like; perfectly put together all the time. This was not me. Therefore I felt as if I could do a great job convincing God that the idea of my husband becoming the Senior Pastor was not a good one.

My husband, probably much more humble and in a spiritually good place than I was at the time, decided to pray about it. I thought he was crazy because I clearly believed the answer was an obvious no.

And so began several weeks of long conversations between God and myself where I tried to back out of what He was calling my husband and I to simply because of fear on my end. I remember at one point finally surrendering and releasing it all into God's hands.

It was then I realized God wasn't wanting me to change who I was to be a pastor's wife. He wanted me to be who He created me to be, myself. Did I have the courage to step into this new role that God was entrusting to my husband and I?

In those weeks that turned into months of many conversations with God, being in His presence was where I found the courage to live out this new calling. Courage is not always easy to have. You must overcome your fear and the only way to do that is by being in God's presence.

A verse that has meant a lot to me more recently is from 1 John 4:18 NIV, *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."*

If you are a follower of Jesus, there is no room for fear in your life. You are called to live a life of courage because of the One (Jesus) who loves you perfectly.

I can honestly say that one of the things I feared most (being a pastor's wife), is the very thing that I love most. Sure it's not always easy, but no job is. You choose to do things in life not because they are easy but often because they are hard. Growth comes in your life when you choose the difficult tasks.

God asked me to trust Him fully when He was entrusting this new calling to me. I'm so glad He was patient with me and showed me truth from His word that overcame my fears. The only reason I can live with courage is because of where my courage comes from, the Lord.

If you claim that God is truly Lord over your life, in what areas do you need to have more courage with what God has entrusted to you?

This month you will explore more bible characters and see how they chose to live a life of courage in what God was entrusting to them.

WEEK 1 - MOSES

Moses was the man God chose to lead His people, Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. This was no small job. The amount of Israelites that left Egypt is considered to be around 2.4 million. Just reading that number makes me think Moses could have had a lot of fear to fully trust God in what God was entrusting to him.

Before you get to the verses about God calling Moses, there is an important aspect of his life that I want you to look at. To give you a little history, Moses was a Hebrew born during the time when Pharaoh was killing all the baby boys. To save the life of her baby, Moses' mother (Jochebed) hid him in a basket and put it out in the Nile River. The daughter of Pharaoh was bathing in the river when she spotted the basket with baby Moses in it. She took him into the palace as her own and raised him as an Egyptian. Here is where you will pick up the story.

"One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, 'Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?'

The man said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'What I did must have become known.'

When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, 'Why have you returned so early today?'

They answered, 'An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.'

'And where is he?' Reuel asked his daughters. 'Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.'

Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, 'I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.'

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them." Exodus 2:11-25 NIV

This concludes chapter 2. You meet Moses, a man who is a Hebrew but raised an Egyptian. In an effort to protect his own people, Moses murders an Egyptian and then has to run for his life.

While he is living in Midian as a shepherd and happily married with a son, God meets him at Horeb, the mountain of God. Continue on in chapter 3.

"Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up.'

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!'

And Moses said, 'Here I am.'

'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.'

But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'

And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.'

Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?'

God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'

God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.'

This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'

The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.' But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and

strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.” Exodus 3 NIV

It probably seemed like just another ordinary day for Moses when he went out to pasture his flock, but this day would prove to be extraordinary in the life of Moses.

God met Moses right where he was at, shepherding his sheep. Little did he know that God was going to ask him not to shepherd animals anymore, but people. God’s own people, Israel.

The place where God met Moses was a holy place. He told Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. The word holy means, set apart. When you are in the presence of God you see yourself for who you really are. Understanding God’s holiness is the first step in your relationship with Him.

God is set apart from you because He is without sin and cannot have sin in His presence. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the believers in Rome talked about the reality of sin and what it deserves. Romans 6:23 NIV, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Have you recognized the reality of your sin and your need for a Savior? Do you see the gift that is being offered to you from a holy God? Receive this gift today by repenting of your sin to Jesus and believe in His death and resurrection for you. That is the starting line for living a courageous life.

The encounter Moses had with God at the burning bush revealed God’s holiness. God asked Moses to go back to Egypt and face his past. Sometimes facing your past requires a lot of courage. This would be true for Moses. God was asking him to go back to the very place that he had murdered someone to request that the Israelites be set free.

Part of Moses having the courage to take on this task was God reminding him who he was. God said, *I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.* Notice the word, *your.* God was telling Moses who his real ancestors were and reminding him that he was an Israelite even though he was raised an Egyptian.

Sometimes you need to be reminded of who you are when God is asking you to be courageous. As a follower of Jesus you are a redeemed, chosen and beloved child of God. That is where your strength comes from to have courage.

You can't have courage in and of yourself because eventually fear will creep in and take over. But, if you are a follower of Jesus there is no room for fear in your life.

God also gave Moses one more important detail when He said, *I will be with you*. If God is entrusting something (or someone) to you, put your trust in Him and you will find the courage you need. He will never leave you alone.

Skip ahead a few chapters and read this verse from Exodus 7:7 NIV. *"Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh."*

Friend, you are never too old for God to use you in a bold, powerful way. If Moses and Aaron had the courage to carry on this great task at 80 and 83 years old, then you can have the courage to carry out whatever God is entrusting to you, no matter your age. God is just looking for willing hearts.

Are you willing to live a life of courage?

WEEK 2 - JOSHUA & CALEB

When you see someone living a bold, courageous life, often you want to know their secret. Where does their courage come from?

Today you will look at the life of a young man named Joshua who was Moses' servant. Moses left Joshua the example of spending time with God in the tent of meeting. This tent was outside the camp of Israel and was a place where people would go to seek the Lord.

Exodus 33:11 NIV speaks of a time where you see Joshua spending as much time with God as he could. *"Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent."* Joshua learned early on that courage comes from communing with God.

God had Moses send 12 (one from each tribe in Israel) spies into Canaan to check out the land. God specifically told Moses that He would give this land to Israel.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders'...

At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They gave Moses this account: 'We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.'

Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'

But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.' And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.'"
Numbers 13:1-2, 25-33 NIV

When the spies return and report about what they saw, 10 of the men allowed fear to overcome them while 2 men showed courage. They believed God would give them victory to take the land. The names of these 2 men were Caleb & Joshua. Continue on in the next chapter and you will read how the Israelites respond to the report.

“That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, ‘If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?’ And they said to each other, ‘We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.’

Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, ‘The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.’ But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.” Numbers 14:1-10 NIV

This does not look real great for Joshua and Caleb. The Israelites were going to stone them for the courage they were having. Joshua & Caleb respond by telling Israel, *the Lord is with us, do not be afraid*. That was where Joshua and Caleb’s courage was coming from. The fact that they knew and believed God was with them and would go before them. Would Israel choose to trust God when He was entrusting them?

Because of the reaction of the people and their lack of courage, God tells Moses that only Joshua and Caleb out of those 12 men will enter the promised land. The other men would perish in the wilderness along with many others because of their constant grumbling and complaining before the Lord.

Jump ahead with me into the book of Joshua and you will pick up right after the death of Moses.

“After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them, to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates, all the Hittite country, to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 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 1:1-9 NIV

These verses are powerful words that God spoke to Joshua as he assumed the position as leader of Israel. God tells Joshua 3 times to be strong and very courageous. How could Joshua do this? Not in his own strength. It would only be possible because God promised that He would go with him and never leave him alone. Courage comes from, living in God's presence. Joshua was obedient to what God had entrusted to him.

God also reminded Joshua of the importance of meditating on scripture and being obedient to it. When you allow God's word to penetrate the deepest parts of your heart, it will remove any fear that you are living in. God's word is powerful. As a follower of Jesus don't let fear control you.

There would be many times where Joshua would be tempted to be afraid and live in discouragement. God commanded him not to allow those thoughts to control him.

There may be times when you are afraid and living in discouragement as you try to live a courageous life, but remember fear and discouragement don't come from God.

Followers of Jesus are called to live a life of courage and that is only possible when you look to Him. Courage is not an easy word to live by. God never calls you to something and then leaves you alone. If God is with you then you have everything you need to live a courageous life.

God made it very clear that He would go before Joshua and all of Israel in every way to bring them safely into the promised land. He would do it all. They only needed to trust Him as He entrusted them. Do you believe that God will do the same for you?

In closing I want point out the meaning behind Joshua's name. The name Joshua means, *The Lord is my salvation*. Joshua is derived from the Hebrew name, *Yeshua*, also known as Jesus. Joshua was a type of Christ in the Old Testament. He is the one who led Israel into the promised land. Jesus is the One who will lead His people into the promised land of heaven.

You can't get to the promised land of heaven on your own because of your sin. You need saving from sins punishment and that is why God sent Jesus down here to this earth to rescue you. Jesus died on the cross in your place to satisfy God's wrath against your sin and on the third day He rose again.

Jesus said in John 14:6 NIV, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Repent of your sin today and believe in Jesus death and resurrection for you because He is the only way to get to the promise land of heaven.

Your motivation for living a life of courage comes from what Jesus did for you. What has God entrusted to you that you need to trust Him with? That is what it means to live a life of courage.

WEEK 3 - DEBORAH

Think of someone you know that you've always considered to be a courageous person. What examples of courage did you see lived out in this person?

Deborah is known as a woman of courage. She fully trusted God when God was entrusting her. As you read her story today in Judges 4, I want you to compare her with another character in the story, Barak. Barak displayed the opposite of courage and you see him being more of a coward.

"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, now that Ehud was dead. So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help. Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, 'The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'

Barak said to her, 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.' 'Certainly I will go with you,' said Deborah. 'But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.' So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh.

When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.

Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?' So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. At Barak's advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left. Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.

Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, 'Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid.' So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

'I'm thirsty,' he said. 'Please give me some water.' She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

'Stand in the doorway of the tent,' he told her. 'If someone comes by and asks you, Is anyone in there? say No.'

But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. 'Come,' she said, 'I will show you the man you're looking for.' So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple, dead.

On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him."
Judges 4 NIV

Once again you find Israel doing evil in God's sight and because of that God hands them over to Jabin, the King of Canaan. Jabin oppressed God's people for 20 years.

Meanwhile, you find the current judge in Israel to be Deborah. You learn from the verses that Deborah was also a married woman. She took her job as judge over Israel seriously. It is very evident from this chapter that Deborah was a woman of wisdom.

Deborah called Barak and told him that God is commanding Israel go into battle against Jabin. God says He will deliver Sisera (the commander of Jabin's army) into their hands. You see this over and over in the Old Testament where God tells Israel that *He will* go before them and clear the way for them to be successful. God was going to do all the work. All that was required of them was obedience.

Have you realized the same is true when it comes to your problem of sin? Your sin has put a separation between you and God because of His holiness. Sin requires a punishment. But God, out of His unconditional love for you, made a way for you to be forgiven of your sin when He sent His perfect Son Jesus down here to this earth. Jesus died a sinners death on the cross and gave His blood willingly for you to satisfy the wrath of God. Hebrews 9:22 NIV says, *"...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."*

Jesus went before you and He did it all for you. He offers you forgiveness if you repent of your sin and believe on His death and resurrection for you. This was God's perfect plan to deliver you from sins punishment leading to death. Over and over God went before Israel and delivered them and He can do the same for you.

Deborah believed God would deliver Israel when she told Barak this message. Barak on the other hand was a coward. He didn't have the courage to go into battle alone. What he didn't realize was that having God's presence go before Israel would be enough. Barak wanted a physical presence of someone to give him courage to go into battle so he begged Deborah to take the lead.

Here for the first time you see a strong, courageous woman being a military leader and leading Israel into battle. The only reason Deborah had the courage to do this was because she fully trusted God when God was entrusting her. When Deborah gave the green light for Israel to go into battle, she reminded them that God was going before them and would deliver Sisera and his army into their hands, and He does.

The only one who escapes is Sisera. Then you meet another woman, Jael who was also bold and courageous. Jael invited Sisera into her tent to hide him but ended up killing him. So really God used 2 women who had courage to defeat Israel's enemy.

Take some time today to read Judges 5. This chapter is a song of victory sung by Deborah and Barak together. The very last verse of that song is one that I want to close with. *"So may all your enemies perish, Lord! But may all who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength. Then the land had peace forty years."* Judges 5:31 NIV

They end the song focusing on the Lord, and notice what the last sentence says, *the land had peace forty years*. Because of the courage of Deborah who fully trusted God when God was entrusting her, there was peace in Israel for 40 years. That is incredible!

Deborah was just an ordinary woman who was willing to be judge over Israel that God used in a powerful way. Notice...Deborah was willing.

The courage Deborah displayed should motivate you to live in the same way. As a follower of Jesus you are called to live a courageous life and not allow fear to control you.

What is stopping you from being obedient to live a life of courage? Is it fear of the unknown? Fear of what others will say or think? Fear of stepping outside your comfort zone? Do you see how all 3 of those questions begin with fear?

Fear is not from God. In what areas of your life do you need to trust God where He is entrusting you?

Follower of Jesus, you don't have to try harder to have courage, it's already in you. Courage does not come from you, but from the One who lives within you. *"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."* Romans 8:11 NIV

You have all you need to live a courageous life because of the Holy Spirit inside you. What is stopping you?

WEEK 4 - SHADRACH, MESHACH & ABEDNEGO

When I think of people who live with courage, some of the first ones who come to mind are missionaries. Many of these people have given up the comfort of their home, family and friends to move to another place, learn a new culture and share the good news of Jesus with a group of people.

They have chosen not to live with fear but instead with courage in the unconditional love of Jesus and share that love with others. They have chosen to trust God when He is entrusting them to share His gospel.

Three men you will study today were kind of like missionaries in a foreign land. Not because they necessarily wanted to be but because of what happened to them as teenagers.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were boys who were captured during the time that Babylon besieged Jerusalem. The boys along with their friend Daniel were taken to Babylon to be indoctrinated with a false religion. However, these boys were part of God's chosen people Israel and therefore they had been taught and trained well in the way of Yaweh, the Lord God.

The chapter you will read today is one that shows these boys having bold courage to stand against the worship of anyone but God. In the end you see how God rewards their courage in a way that's never been seen before. Daniel 3,

"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, 'Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.'

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, 'May the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of

the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.' Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?'

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, 'Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?'

They replied, 'Certainly, Your Majesty.'

He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!'

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.'

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon."

Daniel 3 NIV

To begin unpacking this I want you to look closely at the names of these boys. In Daniel 1 the commander of the officials renamed them when they were brought to Babylon. This was part of their indoctrination program to strip them of knowing who they really were.

- Shadrach's real name was Hananiah which means, *Beloved by God*. They changed his name to Shadrach which means, *command of the moon god*.
- Meshach's real name was Mishael which means, *Who is like God*. They changed his name to Meshach which means, *who is what Aku is*. Aku was the Babylonian moon god.
- Abednego's real name was Azariah which means, *God has helped*. They changed his name to Abednego which means, *servant of Nabu (this was the Babylonian god of wisdom and Nebuchadnezzar's favorite god)*.

When you know who you really are it gives you the courage to stand strong even when everything and everyone around you is trying to rename you. Have you ever thought about the fact that the devil likes to rename you the most with fear? That is the total opposite of who God says you are as one of His followers.

These three men knew their true identity in God and because of that nothing could stop them, not even death, from worshipping the true God, Yaweh. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not have to defend themselves because they knew God would deliver them. They could be fearless because they knew their God would be faithful even in the fire.

When you choose to live a life of courage, you don't have to defend yourself to others. Leave that in the hands of God and remember to stay faithful and true to Him and His word.

Sometimes it's easy to think when talking about courage that it's a great idea for all people to have courage to live out who they feel they are. Be careful with that kind of thinking in this world. I never want you to think that acting on your fleshly desires and giving in to sin is a courageous way to live because it is not. That is going against God and His word. Many people are falling prey to the devil's lies in this way.

The temptation to live with that kind of thinking is strong because sin can look very appealing. It looked appealing to Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden and because they gave into it, sin spread to all mankind. Romans 5:12 NIV says, *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned."*

It seems there is no hope, but remember hope is always found in Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent from heaven to die on the cross, satisfying God's wrath against sin. God brought Him back to life on the third day to prove that He is victorious over sin and death. God offers you the free gift of salvation by repenting of your sin and believing in Jesus death and resurrection to save you.

This world applauds courage in people who decide they are going to publicly live in sin but that is not what Jesus calls you to. In Matthew 16:24 NIV Jesus said, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*"

It's not about you and your wants and fleshly desires, it's all about living for Jesus who died to save you.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego trusted God when He was entrusting them. Their courage came from who they worshipped, the one true God. They experienced freedom in the fire because of who was with them. Their courage even led King Nebuchadnezzar to believe in God.

How is God calling you to have courage? Having courage will be hard, but God within you will always equip you to do the hard work. See yourself as *being* in Christ before *doing* in Christ.

Make the choice daily to wake up to God's word and not your fears. I believe that is why so many men and women are able to leave everything they know behind and fully follow Jesus on the mission field because every morning they choose to wake up to God's word over their fears and it gives them the courage they need.

Many missionaries have experienced the opposite of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Some have been killed taking a stand for and preaching Jesus Christ. The only way they were able to stand strong to the end is because their courage was not found in themselves but in the One who lives within them.

WEEK 5 - NEHEMIAH

I have been defining courage this month as *trusting God when He entrusts you*. To close out this month of living by the word courage I want to look at a man in scripture that I've never studied with you before. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia. He was a Jew who was born during the time that the ancient kingdom of Judah was taken captive in Babylon.

Nehemiah was a man who deeply loved God. He took his job as cupbearer to the king very seriously. The job itself was one that required a lot of courage. A cupbearer would taste the wine before it was given to the king to make sure it was not poisoned. Nehemiah put his own life on the line to save the life of the king. That would take a lot of courage.

Nehemiah found out the wall that was supposed to protect the city of Jerusalem, where his own people lived, was broken down and its gates were burned with fire. The Jews who did survive the captivity were in great distress and constantly worried about their enemies getting in and defeating them. This wall that gave them security was broken.

You find his response to this news in Nehemiah 1:4 NIV, *"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."* When you hear bad news is that your first response? Mourning, fasting and praying? This is a great example of what it looks like to grieve over something in a God honoring way.

Nehemiah did not stay in that place forever. Action was required and this is where you see him live a life of courage despite all the discouragement and distractions around him. Pick it up with me in chapter 2.

"In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, 'Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.'

I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, 'May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?'

The king said to me, 'What is it you want?'

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, 'If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.'

Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, 'How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?' It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

I also said to him, 'If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the

gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?' And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests." Nehemiah 2:1-8 NIV

When the king notices something is not right with Nehemiah at first Nehemiah is afraid to be honest with him. But then you see the courage start to appear as he shares about the grief he feels for God's people (his own people) not being protected from their enemies.

I love how Nehemiah prays before answering the king's next question. He makes his full request and the king grants him his request because it says, *the gracious hand of my God was on me.*

As God was entrusting this assignment to Nehemiah, he responds with obedient and bold courage. He goes to Jerusalem to assess the damage of the wall and then responds to his people in the following verses,

"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.' I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. 'What is this you are doing?' they asked. 'Are you rebelling against the king?'

I answered them by saying, 'The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.'"
Nehemiah 2:17-20 NIV

Nehemiah's courage was contagious and spread to the people. They joined him in the rebuilding of the wall. When Sanballat and Tobiah started making fun of them, their response was one of courage...*God will give us success.* They fully trusted God when He was entrusting them.

Discouragement started to set in as the construction began and their enemies tried everything they could to prevent the wall from being rebuilt. Continue on in Nehemiah 4,

"But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, 'The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.'

Also our enemies said, 'Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.'

Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, 'Wherever you turn, they will attack us.'

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.'

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work." Nehemiah 4:7-15 NIV

The enemies were trying to distract Nehemiah and the people from being obedient, but their plans did not work. Nehemiah continued to remind the people not to fear their enemies. God called them to live a life of courage despite what others said about them.

These next verses are ones that the book of Nehemiah is known for. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and others started getting desperate as they watched the wall coming to completion so they called for a meeting with Nehemiah. Nehemiah's response is perfect.

"When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it, though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates, Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: 'Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.'

*But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: '**I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down.** Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?'" Nehemiah 6:1-3 NIV*

In the last verse it seems to me that Nehemiah was saying, *I'm having courage and I can't stop to meet with you.* Have you ever felt discouraged or defeated by people around you trying to stop you from living a courageous life?

Nehemiah was not about to let these men prevent him from doing what God had called him to. Don't let others stop you from living a life of courage and obedience to what God is calling you to. People won't always understand God's call on your life and that is okay. You are not called to be obedient to others, but to God.

People may think you're crazy for leaving a perfectly, comfortable and easy life behind you in order to live a courageous life for God's kingdom. Remind yourself that scripture says it is better to please God than men.

Paul said in Galatians 1:10 NIV, *"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."* Living as a follower of Jesus is a call to live a courageous life.

The last two verses I want you to read are so good. Check out Nehemiah 6:15-16, *"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, **all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence**, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God."* Nehemiah 6:15-16 NIV

This is such a great way to sum up the life of courage that God called Nehemiah to. When the wall was finished the surrounding nations were the total opposite of courage. They lost all their confidence and fear took hold of them because they realized that this work had not only been done by Nehemiah and his people but also with the help of God. He was a part of the work.

When you choose to live a courageous life as a follower of Jesus remember that He is always with you. That is a promise He gives to His followers in Hebrews 13:5-6 NIV, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'"*