

# STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

WEEKS OF PRAYER 2023-02 (09/04-09/17/2023)

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 04 - An impossible order

Bible passage(s): 1 Corinthians 16:13; Deuteronomy 31:1-8; Joshua 1:1-9

"Be strong and courageous!" Three Bible passages, three times the same words.

For Joshua, they were an invitation by his mentor Moses and by God for the new task as leader of the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land. A path that would demand everything of him. A path full of challenges, obstacles and struggles. But also a path on which lay all that he and the people had long dreamed of. It would require courage and strength.

For the Christians in Corinth, it was a matter of finding orientation in an environment that had very different values from theirs. In a city marked by pagan practices and systems. How should they live in this time and place? Paul's invitation: Be courageous, be strong!

Isn't that an impossible order? Either you are courageous, or you are not. Either you have strength or you don't. Where can you get them if you don't have them?

The reasoning is the same in all three texts: because God Himself is with them, they can be strong and courageous.

The more we understand what it means that Jesus gave His life for us, the more courageous we will be. Jesus did not die so that we would somehow drag ourselves through this life, but so that we could live a life in His strength. It is not our abilities that matter, but His. He makes us strong and courageous so that this world can meet Jesus through us.

Like Joshua, we stand on the threshold of a land that God wants to give us. He wants to give you more than you can imagine. Through you, the atmosphere at your workplace can change, your neighborhood can come to know Jesus, politics and economics can be shaped, your family can experience restoration, your employees can experience the generosity of heaven. So much is possible.

Why? Because God is with you. You are not going alone. Be strong and courageous. The kingdom of God cannot be stopped. In God's commands there is always a promise, because what He commands, He will enable us to do.

Set a goal for the 14 days of this reading plan: In what area of your life would you like to receive new courage and strength from God? Start praying for it today and continue to pray over the next few days.

## TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 05 - Stretch your limits

Bible passage(s): Luke 13:18-19; Ephesians 4:15; 2 Peter 3:18

When you think about the goal you set yesterday: What is your biggest concern in this area? What scares you?

The 3-zone model describes different zones in which we can find ourselves in life: comfort zone, growth zone or panic zone.

In the comfort zone, we live our everyday lives. We do what we always do. We know the people, the processes, the tasks. This feels good, but brings little change. On the contrary: the longer we stay in the comfort zone, the smaller it becomes.

In contrast, in the areas for which we lack courage and strength, we instantly find ourselves in the panic zone. Here we are overwhelmed and wonder how we will ever manage it. We feel incapable and paralyzed. Therefore, we try to avoid the panic zones of life or try to leave them as quickly as possible.

Between those two is the growth zone. As we have seen in today's scriptures, the Bible talks a lot about this zone. The kingdom of God is designed for growth. We are not perfect, but bit by bit and step by step we grow into tasks and areas that we never thought we would master.

Like the small mustard seed, which bit by bit becomes a large plant. Like Joshua, whose path did not begin by leading a great nation into war. In the books of Moses, we read at various points of Joshua's growth zones that led him to this place. He is first commissioned by Moses to lead a single battle (Exodus 17:9). He is present when Moses receives the Ten Commandments on the mountain (Exodus 24:13). When Moses talks to God in the Tent of Meeting, Joshua is also there and stays there even longer in closeness to God (Ex 33:11).

Joshua knew that courage and strength can only be found with God. Because the goal of our growth is to become more and more like Jesus. He is courage and strength in person. The more we understand about Him and do what He tells us to do, the more we grow. He rarely leads us into the panic zone, but He also rarely leaves us in the comfort zone.

Ask Him: What small step can I take today in the area that challenges me? Ask Him for His strength. Then take the step.

## WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 06 - What do you see?

Bible passage(s): Deuteronomy 13:1-3, 16, 25-33; Deuteronomy 14:6-9; 2 Kings 6:13-17

Courage is not the absence of fear and uncertainty. Courage means doing something even though we are afraid, because something else is more important than fear. Because even in the growth zones of life, some things will make us feel uncertain. If we want to be courageous nevertheless, a change in our perspective will help us. In today's stories, we see what that can look like.

When the Israelites approach the Promised Land, Moses sends out scouts. Twelve men who all see the same things and yet see very different things. Ten of them see, above all, big, strong enemies and well-fortified cities. Their conclusion: "We cannot fight against them. The land is devouring its inhabitants. They are giants and we are only locusts in their eyes." Caleb draws a different conclusion, "Let's go. We can definitely defeat them." Joshua agrees with him.

Twelve men see the same situation, but their interpretation of the situation is different. Some look mainly at the circumstances (giants, walls), others look mainly at God's possibilities. The locust mentality chases us back into the comfort zone. Looking at the possibilities of God makes us courageous. Because when He gives us a mission, it is primarily about His possibilities, not ours. What He commands, He makes possible.

How we interpret the circumstances of our lives has a lot to do with what our image of God is and what we look at. We may ask God to show us what He sees. Just as Elisha does for his servant. Through God's eyes we see that there are more on our side than against us.

The voice of fear asks, "What if it goes wrong?" The voice of courage asks, "But what if it works? Wouldn't that be great?" Living courageously in the growth zone brings glory to God because it shows the world what He can do. Because without Him, these things would not be possible.

Courage is the willingness to make a mistake. It is the realization that the pain of not even trying is greater than the pain of possibly being wrong. Risk is part of the growth zone. But so are wonders.

Where have you used circumstances as an excuse not to do something? Talk to Jesus about it. Apologize to Him. Ask Him to show to you His perspective.

## THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 07 - More is more

Bible passage(s): Matthew 14:22-33; Acts 5:15-16; 9:36-43

Peter is known to many people mainly because of his failures. He betrays his friend Jesus three times shortly before the crucifixion. During Jesus' arrest, he cuts off a soldier's ear and is rebuked by Jesus as a result. He tries to walk on water and sinks.

In some Bible translations, the latter story is titled "The Sinking Peter." But let me ask you this: Who among the readers of this reading plan has ever walked on water? No one? Okay.

After all, Peter walked a few steps on the water before he sank. Thus he has something ahead of all of us. Peter was a person with a "hunger for more". He wanted to experience everything there was to experience with Jesus. In doing so, he missed the mark in some cases. But it is this positive dissatisfaction through which also he experienced incredible things.

After the power of the Holy Spirit came upon this "hunger for more" at Pentecost, incredible miracles happened in Peter's life. Dead people came back to life. People were healed when his shadow touched them. This was not Peter's merit, but God's working through Peter.

Because Jesus knew what was possible, He rebuked Peter in the boat saying, "Why did you doubt?" Peter had initially trusted Jesus' words that the water would hold him, and it did. Peter sank only when he stopped trusting Jesus.

If we want to experience greater things with God, it takes three things:

1. God's invitation - as Jesus calls Peter onto the water. Where has God already spoken to you to step out onto the water?
2. our trust in Jesus - that everything is possible because He is with us. He is not standing in the boat and sending us out into the uncertain, but He is there on the water and calls us to the place where He already is.
3. stepping out of the boat – fueled by the hunger for more of God in our lives. Out of the comfort zone, into the growth zone. And in the worst case, Jesus is nearby to catch us, if we sink.

Did you take that small step you resolved to take the day before yesterday? If not, do it today. If so, what next step can you take today?

## FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 08 - The Spirit of Strength

Bible passage(s): 2 Timothy 1:7; Acts 4:23-31; Proverbs 28:1; John 15:5

What we saw yesterday with Peter is possible for all of us. On Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit filled him and through that, the man who wanted more from God became a man who actually experienced more with God. The Holy Spirit made the difference.

Paul calls it the "spirit of power". When we believe in Jesus, we already have this spirit of power within us. At the same time, we may ask Him to fill us with even more power. In the book of Acts, we see what happens when this Spirit of power fills people. After Peter and John are threatened by the highest political authority that they should by no means speak of Jesus anymore, the whole church asks God for the power to continue speaking of Jesus despite the opposition. God's answer: the power of the Holy Spirit fills them and they are filled with courage and strength to continue.

Whenever it is a matter of us telling about Jesus in this world, the Holy Spirit is very happy to help us with his power. We may ask Him at any time for the courage and strength to tell others about Jesus. We may pray for appropriate situations today. We may ask for wisdom and the appropriate words from him. For this is what Jesus sent him for.

Proverbs finds a fitting poetic image. Those who travel without God run away, even if there is actually no danger. But those who trust in God's strength become fearless like a lion. It is not our strength, but God's strength.

This is what Jesus means when He speaks of Him being the vine and us clinging to Him as branches. Fruit grows when we are connected to Him. Close to Him we get courage and strength to live a life for Jesus in this world.

Take at least 15 minutes today, turn on your favorite worship playlist, and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you anew with His power. Then get quiet, wait, and receive in faith. You may feel something, you may not. Maybe you will only notice it later in those situations where you lacked strength and courage before.

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 09 - Burning (Out)

Bible passage(s): 1 Kings 19:1-13

Why it is important to keep receiving strength from God is what we see in today's story. Elijah was one of the strongest and most courageous people ever in Israel. He took on hundreds of opponents by himself. He raised a dead child to life. His prayers determined whether it rained in Israel or not. A strong and courageous man of faith.

Why does this man suddenly collapse in the desert under a bush, wanting to die? After all his burning for God, he is burned out. He was so busy that he didn't notice how the fuel for his fire was running low. The last bit was used up when Jezebel threatened him again.

Our hunger for more of God can bring us to the same point if it is not nourished from the right source. If we don't stay connected to the vine, as Jesus puts it, we will be able to keep running for quite a while, but eventually the power will run out. If we get lost in what we are doing for God and miss being connected to Him, then sooner or later we will feel it.

God lovingly takes care of the situation. He makes sure that Elijah regains his strength. The answer to Elijah's frustration is not arguments, but an encounter with God. This is what we were created for. There we find what we are looking for. Not in the storm, earthquake or fire, but in the quiet voice of God.

Should you feel burned out, the place to meet God is the point to recharge. The longer we have continued even though we were burned out, the more help it may take to regain our strength. It may be necessary to see a doctor or at least a counselor to start the healing process.

If you are doing well, let this story be a reminder to you: More than anything we can do FOR Him, God wants us to live WITH Him. Courage and strength come from Him. He changes us so that we can change this world with Him.

Today, take as much time as you can to encounter God in whatever way is easiest for you (read your bible, worship, be in nature, paint a picture, pray with others...).

## SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10 – World upside down

Bible passage(s): 1 Corinthians 1:25-29; 2 Corinthians 12:6-10; 2 Corinthians 13:3-4

When you read Paul's statements in the first chapter of First Corinthians, at first you don't know exactly whether they are meant to be an encouragement or an insult. So only a few of us are powerful or wise, instead we are foolish and weak. In Second Corinthians, Paul says that God deliberately does not take away a certain weakness of his, even though he has asked Him to. How are we supposed to live a strong and courageous life if God chooses us explicitly because we are weak?

The short answer: there is no living in God's strength without first realizing our human weakness. Or in the words of Paul, "When I am weak, I am strong."

The longer answer: We don't have to be strong and courageous in all areas of our lives for God to use us in some. Jesus was perfect; we are not. One of our greatest weaknesses is that we are quick to forget how much we need God. Instead, we keep pretending to ourselves and others that we have everything under control.

The weaknesses of our life bring us to our knees. They show us that we need the "spirit of strength". Because ultimately it is about God's kingdom and His plans for this world. He is looking for people who stand before Him with open hands to be used by Him. Paul writes it in several places: The old man with all his false ambitions and fears is dead. The new man, Jesus in us, is growing and he is courageous and strong. The "weakest" moment of Jesus, when He died on the cross, was the moment of His greatest strength. Now He is the Risen One who reigns over all the powers and authorities in heaven and on earth. And with Him we also reign.

The realization of our weakness is not an excuse to remain in sin and patterns of bad behavior. Rather, it leads us to stop trying to accomplish everything on our own and start receiving from God the freedom we seek.

Two possible things you can do today:

1. Make a list of strengths that God has given you. Ask others what they think are your greatest strengths. Thank God for your strengths.
2. Ask God to show you why and how the areas where you feel weak can become places of His strength.

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11 – Don't do it alone

Bible passage(s): Exodus 17:8-13; Matthew 26:36-38; 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

We have reached the halfway point of the reading plan. The first half was about how God wants to bring forth courage and strength in our lives. The second half will now be about the things that keep us from experiencing that.

The devil's tactic has always been to isolate people. It began in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) when the serpent first addressed Eve alone. The result was the isolation of human beings from God and from each other. Because when we are isolated, we are most vulnerable.

God created us humans to draw strength and courage from groups. Many social psychological studies have shown that people behave differently in groups than they do alone. This is because we often base our behavior on the people around us. Depending on the group, this can lead to very good or very bad results.

When we surround ourselves with the right people, we become stronger and more courageous. Even Jesus did that. At the moment of His greatest fear, He had Peter, James and John with Him so that He would not be alone. It was better with them than alone (even though they fell asleep). Paul writes how much Titus and the Corinthians encouraged him in a challenging time.

A great image for this reality is also the story of Moses, whose arms are supported by Aaron and Hur until the enemies are defeated. Who will support your arms when you get tired? Whose arms do you support? Who are the people in your life who push you in the right direction (growth zone)? Who are you helping to grow in faith?

If you have thought of some people, let them know today that you are thankful for them. Tell them how they bring you closer to God.

If you couldn't think of anyone, these next steps might be helpful for you:

1. If you are not part of a church, find one close to you. Go to services regularly and stay afterwards to get to know people. Actively reach out to others.
2. Become part of a small group or a team at your church.
3. Meet privately with people from your small group or team who inspire you in your faith.

## TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12 - Courage to tell the truth

Bible passage(s): Psalm 32; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16

Maybe you know scenes from old comic movies where a person tries to run away but doesn't leave the spot. His legs are moving very fast, but he still can't move.

Sin can have the same effect. We want to go forward and yet we don't leave the spot. The Greek word for sin (hamartia) was known to people from archery, among other things. It means missing the mark. Sin, then, refers to the things we do (or don't do) that miss the mark God has for our lives and the lives of those around us.

The power of sin is mostly in the secrecy. It is the things we hide from others or are blind to ourselves. Sins are the obstacles we stumble over. Through them, we tear down what we tried to build up.

We begin our journey with Jesus by recognizing just that: We are sinners and need salvation. The promise of the Bible is clear: everyone who believes in Jesus is forgiven for all sins. Our separation from God has forever ended. Yet sin can still affect our behavior, speaking, and thinking. Like a gift that we unwrap little by little, we discover more and more the freedom that Jesus wants to give us.

The way to this freedom is to make the hidden visible. Because as soon as sin becomes visible, it loses its power. The Bible calls this confession. This has two levels:

1. We admit before God where we have admitted sin and apologize to Him. God knows all our sins. But by confessing we are telling Him: I am sorry. Just as we do in every relationship when we make mistakes. Because sin is always an action against God's good intentions.
2. We talk to a close friend, our partner, or a spiritual director about what has been hidden. The Bible promises that there is a power of restoration in admitting our sins to others.

Today, realize anew what it means that Jesus broke the power of sin once and for all on the cross. It only has as much room in our lives as we allow it. If something has come to your mind while reading this text, take time today to confess it before God and before someone you trust.

## WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 - The Unspectacular God

Bible passage(s): Luke 2:25-35; Matthew 6:31-33

Rarely do we go up to our work colleagues and tell them, "I really need to tell you about yesterday. I had the most ordinary day; all business as usual." No, we tell each other the spectacular experiences - the extraordinary.

Life with God is no different. We celebrate the stories of extraordinary miracles that God has done. We find them in the Bible, we hear about them in podcasts, and we read about them in books. It's good that we give God the glory for what he does. But it's also important that we understand: Most miracles are the result of a longer journey. The spectacular moment is often the result of unspectacular faithfulness in everyday life over a longer time.

This was also the case with Simeon. Simeon was a man who had learned over many years to live in dependence on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had promised to him that he would not die until he saw the Savior of the world. Simeon probably held on to this promise for many years.

Then one day the moment finally came when the Holy Spirit said to him, "This baby is the Savior of whom I have spoken." A spectacular moment. But this moment was the result of a lifestyle in which, day after day, Simeon had "put the kingdom of God first," as Jesus puts it. He had learned to listen to the Holy Spirit. The spectacular moment that even got him a spot in the Bible was the result of his everyday life with God.

This is the path to a strong and courageous life with spectacular miracles. Learning day by day in the midst of our daily lives how the Holy Spirit speaks to us and then doing those things. It is the many small steps of growth that we say yes to. The moments when we decide to put God's kingdom above our own comfort.

Often the obstacle is not that we don't want to, but that we forget it. In the busyness of family, work, friends, sports and volunteering, we are sometimes just too busy to listen clearly. But we can train ourselves to do that.

Today, watch for situations when the Holy Spirit speaks to you. Do what He tells you to. If you like, stick a post-it as a reminder in a place where you will see it again and again throughout the day.

## THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14 - Become who you are

Bible passage(s): Joshua 2:1-11; Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 1:3; Ephesians 2:8-10; Ephesians 3:14-21

We have read a story of spies earlier in this reading plan. The people of Israel stood at the gates of the Promised Land and sent out spies. Unfortunately, most of them were afraid and discouraged the people by their report. The result was 40 penalty rounds in the desert. We saw that the problem was their wrong perspective. They looked at the circumstances through their own abilities, not through God's abilities.

Another way to have more courage would have been to have a different view of themselves. They not only underestimated God's abilities, but also their own. A tough, strong people, steeled by long years of hard work with God on their side. In the book of Joshua, we read another account of scouts. Joshua had sent them to Jericho a few years later to explore the city. There they learn that the people were even more afraid of the Israelites than the Israelites were of them. Rahab states, "I know that the Lord has given you this land."

Paul describes in the letter to the Romans our way with God by the word metamorphosis (translated as "transformation") - in our spiritual DNA the butterfly already exists, even if from the outside only a fat caterpillar can be seen. The way to the butterfly is to "renew our thinking", namely that we recognize more and more how God sees us and what He is capable of.

If we think too little of ourselves, it is basically an insult to God. For He promises us that His mighty power is at work in us (Ephesians 3:20), that His good deeds are already prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10), and that in Jesus we are richly blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

Courage and strength come when we better understand who Jesus is in us and how He sees us. We are not limited by our own abilities because He gives us His abilities. The more we understand this, the more courageously we can live.

What is the area you set out to become stronger and more courageous in at the beginning of this reading plan? Today, write down three biblical truths for this area that God thinks about you. Speak them out loud over yourself. Think about what your life could look like if you understood these truths of God more deeply. Thank God that He sees you this way and that He makes you courageous and strong.

## FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 - Resistance

Bible passage(s): 2 Timothy 3:12; Matthew 5:11-12; Matthew 5:43-45; Romans 12:14; 1 Peter 3:13-17; Ephesians 6:18-20; Hebrews 13:3

In the last few days, the focus has been on obstacles that are rooted in ourselves. But there are also obstacles that come from outside. Resistance that we experience. Jesus announces that people will reject us because we believe in him. Paul writes to Timothy that everyone who aligns his life with God's will experience opposition and persecution.

Perhaps you have experienced this resistance in your own family when you came to faith in Jesus. Or with your colleagues at work when you refused to go along with something that was against your convictions. Or with your friends who didn't understand why you changed the way you did. Sometimes we experience resistance from people because we are living our lives according to God's will and it doesn't always match their will.

The biblical way of dealing with opposition runs throughout the New Testament: we are to love our enemies, pray for them, and - according to Jesus - even rejoice in persecution. We are nevertheless to treat people with kindness and respect. This will open doors so that we can tell about our hope in Jesus.

We must, of course, be careful not to label every challenge in life as persecution. When people rightly call our attention to wrong behavior, that is not persecution. When we are unloving or uncharitable, the problem is not with others, but with us. The core of persecution is that we suffer because we believe in Jesus. In the end, people do not reject us at all, but Jesus in us. Jesus Himself said that there are only two ways to relate to Him. Either for Him or against Him. There is no in between.

We are doing comparatively well in our country. Our constitution protects the right to live our faith freely. This is not the case in many other countries. People experience systematic discrimination, exclusion, imprisonment and even death because they believe in Jesus. The Bible asks us to pray for our brothers and sisters in faith in other countries who experience persecution on a very different level than we do. We are to pray that they may continue to stand boldly and strongly by their faith and not give up.

Take a few minutes today to pray for people who are experiencing disadvantage, violence and abuse because they believe in Jesus. For more information and concrete help on prayer, visit [Open Doors](#).

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16 - Fear of Man

Bible passage(s): Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Acts 5:27-29; Hebrews 13:6; Proverbs 29:25.

Resistance can make us anxious. Even the anticipation of possible resistance can make us uneasy. The Bible refers to this fear as the "fear of man" or "wanting to please people".

We have a choice between pleasing God and pleasing people. Paul says that whoever wants to please people is not a servant of Jesus. What sounds harsh at first is absolutely true. If I set my life up to please others, then I am their servant. I try to recognize what they want and adjust my life accordingly. In doing so, I serve them and their (presumed) desires.

We can either serve Jesus or serve people. Of course, when you put it like that, the choice is easy. We all want to serve Jesus. We know that His opinion matters more than that of others.

Nevertheless, this can be difficult for us in everyday life. We say what we think others want to hear. We try to avoid anger and resistance by adjusting our behavior so that we don't cause offense. What at first seems like a good strategy for a quiet, happy life is actually a prison into which we voluntarily put ourselves. We are no longer free to do what we want. We are often no longer free to do what God wants us to do either.

The good news is that this prison has no lock. We have let ourselves in. We can also go out again - with God's help. Remember: God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of strength. He makes us courageous and strong. We will have more freedom and be happier if we serve Jesus than if we fear people.

For many, fear of man is deeply internalized. For some, it is a survival instinct from their childhood to bring stability to unstable environments. For others, the desire for harmony is simply part of their personality.

God wants to give you freedom. Where does fear of man keep you from doing the things God wants you to do? Think about what it costs you. How does it constrict you? Where does it rob you of freedom?

Begin the process of trusting God more than people in your daily life. Let Him control how the relationships in your life develop. Sure we want the approval of others, but we don't need it. Jesus' approval is the only one we really need. Should others withdraw their approval from us, He will be there for us.

## SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17 – Keep at it

Bible passage(s): Romans 8:18-30; Galatians 6:9-10; Psalm 37:1-7

Hopefully this reading plan has encouraged you: Be strong and courageous! God is with you. He gives you strength. If you are willing to live in the growth zone of life, obstacles will be removed one by one. Jesus does not lose a battle. We only lose where we give up hope.

Paul encourages the Christians in Rome, and thus also us, that we should endure the tensions of this life. With Jesus everything is possible, but not in all areas will we experience the breakthroughs we desire in this life. This is no reason to give up hope. We know we are on our way to a better place. The place for which we were created: forever with God. There, at the latest, we will experience everything we long for in this life.

This perspective makes us strong and courageous. We have nothing to lose because we have already won everything in Jesus. We experience many things here, but some things we do not. We are not perfect. But we don't have to be, because Jesus was perfect. In Him, we are given everything that we cannot achieve on our own. It is not about our performance, but about Jesus in us, who gains more and more space. We are being changed by Him, from the inside out. Little by little, we become more courageous and stronger.

We may trust in God's good plan at all times. The Holy Spirit gives us strength in our weakness. The more we listen to Him and act accordingly, the more fear we will lose and the more courage and strength will show up in our lives.

If we follow this path of small courageous steps not only for 14 days, but for the rest of our lives, miracles await us. Therefore, set new goals for yourself at regular intervals: In what area of your life do you want to receive new courage and strength from God? Start praying for it regularly.

Life in the growth zone may not always be comfortable, but it is filled with joy and freedom. Miracles are waiting for you in the growth zone. Jesus is waiting for you in the growth zone.