



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 6, 2019

“Follow Him—Be Strong and Courageous”

Raise the Sails Sermon Series — Pastor Dan Chun

**A**s the curtains fall back on our Bible passage for today, the beginning of our Raise the Sails Series, we find that Moses has died and Joshua is now to be the leader of the Israelites. Joshua is not a young man, but he is still scared at this daunting new responsibility.

I imagine at this moment Joshua's eyes squint and look across the Jordan River at the land of Canaan, the land God promised them, starting way back with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is the Promised Land. The land of milk and honey.

About 30 years previously Joshua, on orders from Moses, snuck into that territory as a spy with 11 others. He came back, told the people they should move in and conquer the land. He and another spy named Caleb had the faith that God would be with them, but the people were scared after listening to the other ten spies. The ten reported that there were giants in the land and that the Israelites would be like grass-hoppers next to them. They also said that the people already living there were stronger than the Israelites and that they could never conquer them. The leaders listened to them.

So, the Israelites walked away from their opportunity and wandered for another 38 years, instead of just walking for three days to cross the river.

At this moment, Joshua is about 68-70 years of age. He would live for another 40 years. That's lots of Medicare!

Now, it is time to cross the Jordan River and go into the land that Almighty God promised to him and his people.

But even though he had been Moses' aide since his youth and, as an adult, his right hand man who witnessed so many miracles and adventures, I imagine Joshua felt weighed down by the heavy responsibility that he is now the leader of his people. And Moses is not there to give him advice. And in fact, he is scared.

How do I know that? Because, if you are strong in heart, you don't need someone to tell you to be strong. If you are courageous you don't need someone to tell you to be courageous. But if you are scared...?

In the passage we are about to read, three times—yes, three times—God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous, and to be strong and courageous, and—oh, yes—be strong and courageous, then to add, “Do not be afraid or discouraged.”

So now, please stand, if you are able, to hear the Scripture reading for today.

**Joshua 1:1-9** *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.*

**H**ave 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.”

Whether you are a senior citizen, a millennial, or someone who belongs to the generation born after 1995—Generation Z—life can be scary with all the challenges and tragedies that hit us. Whether younger or older we are not immune to things that can scare us—bullying, finances, jobs, health, world economy, climate change, nuclear missile attack.

And then there are times when our Lord actually tells us to do something that is not easy or maybe even crazy, like move a million people from one place to another. That was Joshua’s task.

For some of you, it might not be a gargantuan task like that, but there is something magnified in your life—a health issue, a relationship issue, a family issue, a marriage issue, a money issue, maybe a new job position—where the Lord’s asking you to be strong and courageous.

How can we still follow the Lord and be strong and courageous and not be afraid? When the Lord Himself asks us to do something, *to follow Him*—it can be scary. He might be saying, “Forgive someone.” Yes, you need to be strong and courageous for that.

It might mean to sacrifice a lot of time to volunteer or to be a caregiver—and that means a lot of courage and strength.

It might mean to sacrifice as God tells us to raise the sails of our hearts to go where the winds of the Holy Spirit blow—and that could mean sacrificing our time, talent, or resources for God.

The pain in our lives might be so great, or the adventure that God is directing us to do can be so daunting, that we become fearful and, as a result, not trust God or others. And that’s what I want to talk about today.

I say that in spite of our challenges, we can be bold and courageous *in God* and truly *follow Him* because of three things that we must remember:

- 1. God is good, generous and wise.**
- 2. God gives meaning to life.**
- 3. God is with us – always. And He always has one more move.**

Let’s start with the first one: God is good, generous and wise.

I understand that it is hard to follow God in this world. It is hard to follow Him, especially when He directs or commands people to do the unexpected, and sometimes things that don’t make sense.

Think of the stories in the Bible. God tells Noah to build an ark. Really?

God tells Gideon to reduce his army from 32,000 to only 300 men and then be ready to fight the enemy army described as thick as locusts and having innumerable camels, countless as the sand on the seashore?

Then there’s Moses, who God told to lead His people out of Egypt and go to the edge of the Red Sea where the Egyptians, chasing after them, could easily trap them with no escape.

In the New Testament, Jesus shocks us by telling us to forgive and love our enemies.

All of what I have just said doesn’t make sense, but that’s our Lord. His ways are higher than ours.

There are times when God asks us to be loving and generous. We all know that’s not always easy, but it should help to know that God is incredibly loving and generous. We therefore can trust Him.

How generous is He? He gave Adam and Eve a big beautiful world, perfect in every way. He didn’t give them a tiny island or a patch of arid land. Yes, it was called the “Garden of Eden,” but it was much, much bigger than how we picture the size of gardens today. He gave them, and us, a planet with clean air and clean water and beautiful mountains and trees and fruits and vegetables and animals. It’s over-the-top beautiful and healthy.

God is not stingy! He is so generous. This is His nature! This is His character. And if we follow Him, it should be our character too. He took the Israelites out of the desert and slavery to a land of milk and honey! He is not frugal in doling out blessings.

And morally, when people blew it, like the Prodigal Son in the New Testament, God was not stingy with His grace and mercy. The Father in the story, who represents God, gives his sinful son who repented a ring, sandals, a robe and kills the fatted calf to celebrate his redemption. He is generous in forgiveness.

God’s nature is generous! Way over the top! The essence of God is generosity in all matters—material and grace and mercy.

His people, therefore, if they are really followers of Jesus, should always reflect God’s generosity, in forgiveness, in spreading the gospel, in helping the underdog, in fighting for justice, and in building His church. If we were to have a tattoo on our arm that shows our character, “generous” should be one of them.

**R**ecently, I have been studying and thinking about generosity, taking a long, deep dive in it, theologically and practically. It has changed my life.

My eyes were opened when I thought of God's character of generosity. So many things in life reflect how God loves us. I became more attuned to how God keeps giving and giving to us in so many ways. It could be by what a friend says, or the harmony of events or an encouraging text message or email, a nice note in the mail, or by realizing we live in a phenomenal, beautiful state and a great country in so many ways.

When I am in developing countries, the children and adults *don't* have choices like we do of what we want to eat today. God's people, His church (Luke 15), should be dedicated to be generous with those who do not have a lot. That is part of God's generosity plan in our lives and for them, if we have His character imprinted on our hearts. For those in poverty, God is always working through churches and people like us trying to sponsor children, trying to go out and visit them and to encourage and train the leaders who work with them and fight sex trafficking.

But what about for us personally?

When I go through tough times, I think of how God has been so generous to me in big and little things, how He blesses me more than I deserve. It makes it easier to Follow Him!

God is good, generous, and wise. But now let's go to the second point and go a bit deeper. God gives meaning to life.

Some of you might be saying, "Dan, easy for you to say, how you

feel God has always come through for you, but not for me. Life has been horrible. It feels more like poverty. Things don't go well and sometimes I feel like I'm in a prison. It's one bad thing after another and I feel trapped. There are bars and barbed wire in my life. I feel life is like a concentration camp, like Auschwitz."

So, let's think about a man who actually lived in Auschwitz, captured and put in there by the Nazis.

When times get tough, I think about Victor Frankl and his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. It's a short book, easy to read, and it sold millions. At the time of his death, 22 years ago, it sold 10 million copies, translated in 24 languages.

It's not so much about Frankl's sufferings in the concentration camp, but more of how he found the strength to keep on going and survive. Others gave up, but not him.

Frankl believed that you can take anything away from a person—his riches, his clothes, even his family—but there is one thing that cannot be taken away and that would be your attitude. If you have the attitude of "I have something worth living for," then you can be positive and survive. Hence, his title for his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Sigmund Freud would say a person lives for pleasure, but Frankl says we should have a quest for meaning or, to use his phrase, a will to meaning.

What is the meaning of your life? That is the goal—to find meaning in your life. And when you do, there is no compassion fatigue or giving fatigue.

For the Christian it is to follow Christ. Somehow, when we truly dedicate our life to Him, to be all in for Him, we find meaning. Hope bubbles up. Our work then has more significance, our giving has more meaning, our caring for another has more love and we can have courage during difficult times.

Frankl would say there will be things beyond your control that can take away everything you possess except your freedom to choose how you will respond to a situation. There is no way you can control what happens to you in life, but you can control what you will feel and do about what happens to you.

The Nazis took away so much from Victor Frankl. He wrote, "Fifteen hundred captives were cooped up in a shed built to accommodate probably two hundred at the most. We were cold and hungry and there was not enough room for everyone to squat on the bare ground, let alone to lie down. One five-ounce piece of bread was our only food in four days." [Frankl, Viktor E.. *Man's Search for Meaning* (pp. 10-11). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.]

Many were killed in gas chambers and ovens by the Nazis. Those in Auschwitz who were not killed that way, those who did not die from lack of food or medicine but did in the end die, Frankl wrote they died from lack of hope. Frankl quotes the words of German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche, who is an atheist, but even a broken watch is right twice a day. He said, "He who has a *why* to live can bear almost any *how*."

I don't know how to say it any clearer, but living for Christ is the greatest meaning one can have because it has eternal significance and relevance for a good life on earth. Discovering that Jesus is real and calls us to *follow Him* is the greatest *why*.

It is worth investigating who Jesus is and living for Him. What's there to lose?

The real meaning in life is not your occupation. People who retire can get depressed and they say there is nothing to do. They feel they have no meaning. Their job was all of their meaning.

As a Christian, there is so much to do—if a relationship with God and His ministry was always your meaning—to lead people to Christ, help the poor in Jesus' name, fight injustice in Jesus' name. There are so many needs out there that we can do for God's credit and not ours. That's beyond any retirement or any high school or college degree. It's also about worshipping God, talking to Him, learning to actually experience His loving presence. It's not solely about our jobs.

It's not about accumulation of money. We might have money or talents, but Jesus asks through His parable in Matthew 25, at the end of the day, if you were given one or two or five bags of gold, did you use it for God's purposes or for yourself? Were you a good and faithful servant and followed the Lord? The sad part of the story is that the one who received one bag of gold thought his master was a hard man, not a generous man, and so he only kept the gold for himself. Perish the thought if we think God is a strict, mean God, so I will keep all the gold for myself.

Life is not about our gold, or our job, in and of itself. Frankl says that people without meaning in their life are more greatly exposed to aggression, depression, and addiction. There has got to be a bigger meaning.

Frankl says, "Don't aim at success—the more you aim at it and

make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue [happen afterwards], and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself."

The Cause of Christ is to please Him by letting people know about Him, helping the poor, the stranger in the land, the prisoners.

I say this not because I am a pastor—for I knew back when wasn't a pastor, when I was in the broadcast business and in filmmaking that *everything* that I do is about Christ, and He is the greatest, purest meaning in life. Our occupations are our ministries that should *point to Him*.

If you are having a hard time, I ask, "What if today you say your dreams have been smashed? Then live for others whose dreams have been dashed." That's worth living for.

Maybe you are here today to say, "But Dan, I am the one who is hurting. My dream has been smashed. I feel life has no meaning. I am the one who feels poor or a stranger in a strange land. Dan, you say God is generous, but I don't feel it. I just don't feel it. I want to give up hope."

Then let's move on to the final third point: God is with us—always. And He always has one more move.

There are many versions of Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, but in the original version before a postscript was added, there was a line there that Frankl wrote. Frankl was obviously Jewish for that is why he was put in a concentration camp to possibly die in a gas chamber.

He noticed something about those devout in faith, whether Jewish or Christian, that the one true, holy God gave them strength. In the original version, he wrote this: "We have come to know man as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips."

Frankl knew that God gave meaning to life even to the very end.

Back to today's Scripture: Joshua is at the edge of the Jordan River. It's about 124 miles long if you don't count all its meandering. Some scholars say, it's at least 100 feet wide where Joshua is standing. Normally, the river is only 3 to 10 feet deep, but when they got there it was in flood stage, overflowing the banks of the river. Daunting. How is he going to get across?

As I said, God wants Joshua to move a million people over it, about the size of the population of O'ahu. What if they drown? Joshua is scared, but God says, "Be strong and courageous. And I will be with you always. Follow Me."

When we face our obstacles, we must know that God, The King, always has *one more move*. Years ago, I preached about this truth and recently church Elder Fred Noa said to me, "Dan, there are hundreds of people who have joined the church since you gave that sermon and we need to hear that encouragement again."

In the movie *The Seventh Seal* by Swedish director Ingmar Bergman, there is a scene where Death is playing chess with a knight. If Death wins, then the knight will die.

**A**s the scene unfolds, Death says the knight is checkmated. He is doomed. All is lost.

But if you really study the film and freeze the frame of the checkmate, you discover that it's not true. It's not checkmate!

Let's take a look at it:



Those of you who know chess can see that, actually, the King piece has one more move! The King can actually eliminate Death's piece which is supposedly checkmating him. In a close up shot, you see that the King has one more move and there is no chess piece that can stop him.

### **The King has one more move!**

When we go through difficult times, down times, and we feel cornered, and chaotic, trapped and wrapped, not lightly, but tightly, checkmated and feel deflated with failure, Jesus our Lord, the King of Kings always has one more move!

He is a loving God. Look for Him. Listen for Him. Lean on Him. Never give up! Whatever you are

facing, don't give up. The King has one more move.

Time and time again I have heard how people would go from financial troubles to an unexpected blessing from God if they just don't give up and keep following Him.

I have heard how sick people have been healed.

If we can just survive and not give up whether in Aiea, Aina Haina, or Auschwitz, the King can have one more move.

Yes, much of life is survival, hanging in there and not giving up. So if you are going through a tough time today, know that the King has one more move!

As the J.B. Phillips Translation of the Bible says:

**2 Corinthians 4:8-9** *We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone: we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out!*

So hear that! Even if you have been struck down, you have *not* struck out and the King has one more move!

If you have been down for the count, you have not been knocked out for you can rise again. You can be strong and courageous. Why? For the King has *one more move!*

If you have been hit or hated, you can still be strong and courageous because—and say the phrase with me—the King has one more move!

If you have been down and driven to despair, be strong and courageous for—say it with me—the King has one more move!

And even if you are here today without *feeling* any faith, know that our Lord is reaching out to you to tell you to be strong and courageous and to follow Him, for—say it—the King has one more move!

Don't throw the towel in on life. No need to cut yourself or harm yourself. Be strong and courageous and follow the King. Why? The King has one more move!

For the next six weeks, I am going to wear this wristband every day to remind myself of the Bible verse on it—that I need to be strong and courageous and that I will raise the sails to follow Jesus even if there are hard times.

Just when Satan thought he had checkmated our Lord, Jesus responded with one of His greatest moves right on the night He was betrayed, when He could have been down for the last count. He had one more move.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts, as well as audio and video recordings of sermons, also are available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org) by clicking the Messages tab.