



MORE COURAGE

Pleasing God more means stepping up when no one else will

SUMMARY

We have become a very goal-oriented society, and, while that isn't a bad thing, we often fail to make the greatest purpose our greatest pursuit. With a myriad of options and opportunities, it is so easy for us to get distracted by and begin to drift towards things that aren't necessarily bad things, but they interfere with or take the place of what should be our greatest desire – to please God. This year, let's determine that our life is going to abound with and increase in those things that our Heavenly takes great delight in.

REVIEW

We began this series by establishing the theme for our church this year: **MORE AND MORE - DETERMINED TO PLEASE THE LORD MORE IN 2024.**

We want to abound and increase in the things that God takes great delight in. It's a journey marked by **INTENSITY, INTEGRITY, INTERACTION** (with the Father and the family of God), and **INVESTMENT**.

We've found that it is possible for God to be pleased, for us to know what pleases God, and for us to please God with our life.

With that foundation, we began to consider some key elements that need to be in our life if we are going to please God more.

The first element is **MORE TRUST**. Pleasing God more begins with trusting God most.

The second element is **MORE DISCERNMENT**. Pleasing God more means living right in a world that is wrong.

The third element is **MORE OBEDIENCE**. Pleasing God more means obeying God first.

The fourth element is **MORE FEAR**. Pleasing God more means loving God most.

The fifth element is **MORE WORSHIP**. Pleasing God more means honoring God first.

Last week, we found that the sixth element is **MORE CONSISTENCY**. Our key statement was this: **PLEASING GOD MORE MEANS STAYING FAITHFUL THROUGH IT ALL**.

We found that one of our greatest struggles today is with inconsistency. It is a struggle that puts us and our family at risk, that ruins good fruit (character) and good decisions, and that robs us of a future that is bright and blessed. The reason inconsistency is such a great struggle for us is because instead of dealing with it, we attempt to “justify” it. While it might seem easier at the time, it never ends well.

One of the greatest helps to the cause of Christ is consistent Christianity. As we considered the life of Joshua and Caleb, we found that we are to be consistent in three areas: in our **WORSHIP** of the Lord, in our **WALK** with the Lord, and in our **WAR** for the Lord

Few mountains are being claimed for the Lord and conquered with the help of the Lord today because few have learned how to be consistent through every **SEASON**, through every **STORM**, and through every **STRUGGLE** of life.

MESSAGE

This week, we move a little farther forward in our Bible, following the narrative of the nation of Israel to find our next key element to living life in a way that pleases God more.

After four hundred and thirty years, God brought the nation of Israel out of the hurts and the hardships of the land of Egypt, through the wilderness where they were supposed to learn how to live their new life of faith in and obedience to God, and to the Land of Promise where they were to claim all that God had promised them and practice all that God had commanded them. But that isn't what happened, is it?

The first time the nation of Israel came to the land of Canaan, a lack of faith and a lack of faithfulness prevented them from entering their inheritance for another forty years.

The second time that the nation of Israel came to the land of Canaan, while they were allowed to enter into their inheritance and even began to claim some of their inheritance, the reality is that they suffered many defeats and many losses because they chose not to listen to what God had to say and because they chose not to do things God's way. That is a recipe for **DISOBEDIENCE**, for **DISAPPOINTMENT**, for **DEFEAT** and for great **DIFFICULTY** Which is exactly what the nation of Israel. As a matter of fact, one of the key phrases in the book of Judges is this: *"...Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD..."*

Anytime that God tells us one thing and we do the opposite of what God has told us to do, we will find ourselves under the control of something, or someone, other than God.

It was indeed a dark season in the history of the nation of Israel, but what I want you to understand is that it didn't have to be that way, nor should it have been that way. God had **EQUIPPED** them with everything that they needed for **VICTORY**, but they chose to **ENGAGE** in everything that brings about **DEFEAT** – they did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25).

When we approach the book of Judges, we most often do so focused on the downward cycle of sin that the nation of Israel went through. And there's nothing at all wrong with that because it is clearly found throughout the book, and it can be easily applied to our own lives.

The reality is that when we do what we want, in our own personal lives or on a national level, and we make the choice to leave God out of the equation (until difficulty comes or disaster sets in that is), then we will take our personal lives and our nation on a wild rollercoaster of a ride – one that is filled with **CHOAS**, with **CATASTRPHES**, and with more **CRISIS MOMENTS** than we can count or handle.

Now, that is one way to approach the book of Judges, but I want to come at it from a whole different perspective. Instead of seeing it as a book that is riddled with **COMPROMISE** and **CORRUPTION** (although it indeed is), I want to look at it from the perspective of a **CRY FOR COURAGE**.

Throughout the book of Judges, we're introduced to certain individuals who were used by God to make a difference during very difficult seasons in the nation of Israel. Individuals who were far from perfect, but individuals whose faith in God made them a mighty force for the cause of God.

One of those individuals was a lady named Deborah, and what a mighty woman she was! Here was a woman who served as a **PROPHETESS FOR GOD**, as a **JUDGE IN ISRAEL**, as a **WIFE TO LAPIDOTH**, as a **MOTHER TO HER CHILDREN**, as a **SOLDIER IN BATTLE**, and as a **SINGER/SONGWRITER**. Busy? Yes. Mighty? Absolutely! As a matter of fact, we have one of her songs recorded in Judges chapter 5, and I think that it provides a key launching statement for the rest of the book.

Judges 5:21-23 says, *“Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty. Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field. The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones. Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.”*

Judges 5:31 says, *“So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.”*

If you're in the habit of marking things in the Word of God, I'd like to draw your attention back to verse 31 where the Bible says, *“...let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might...”*

For a few moments, I'd like to consider this thought: **MORE COURAGE - PLEASING GOD
MORE MEANS STEPPING UP WHEN NO ONE ELSE WILL.**

I don't just see this as being a song that Deborah sang; I see it has a call for mighty men and women to step up and to go forth in the power of the Lord. It was a clarion call to the people of God to have courage. The need was great then and the need is still great, perhaps even greater today. When it comes to the **COMMANDS** and to the **CAUSE** of Christ, far too many of God's people have been **COWARDICE** for far too long.

Someone has defined *courage* as the sign to the world around us whether or not we actually believe what we say that we believe, and yet, I agree with C.S. Lewis who said that “Courage is one of the least talked about [but most essential] Christian virtue...”

The truth of the matter is that there seems to be a whole lot more **CONVERSATION** from the people of God today than there is **ACTION**. We recognize that there are some major problems, and we agree that something needs to be done, we just want someone else to be the one who does something about it. We'd rather ride the coattails of somebody that is on fire for the Lord rather than be the spark through which God can accomplish something mighty.

God had given us the principles and the resources that lead to victory, and yet, we allow **FEARS, FOES, and FRUSTRATIONS** to take over, to trap us, and to take from us what God intended to be a blessing to us. Yes, we are in a spiritual **CONFLICT**, but it is a conflict that is to be met by great **COURAGE**.

Joshua was commanded of the Lord to be “...*strong and very courageous...*” (Joshua 1:7), but the truth of the matter is that Israel needed more than one. And that’s what I think we find throughout the book of Judges.

In Judges chapter 6, the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and call him a mighty man of valor and then told him to go forward and fight the enemy in his might.

In Judges chapter 11, Jephthah was identified as a mighty man of valor and God used him to deliver Israel from the Ammonites.

In Judges chapter 18, there were five mighty men of valor who helped the children of Dan claim more of their God-given inheritance.

What I’m trying to say is this: God has not called us to **COWER** in fear before our enemy, to be **CONQUERED** by our enemy, or to be held **CAPTIVE** by our circumstances.

In Ephesians 6:10, Paul told the church of Ephesus to “...*be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*”

In 2 Timothy 2:1, Paul told young Timothy to “...*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*”

In Romans 8:37, Paul tells us that “...*we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*”

What the nation of Israel needed then, and what we need today are individuals who have the courage to step up when no one else seems to be doing so. Men and women who will say: I’ll claim the promises of God; I’ll stand in the power of the Lord; Here am I Lord, fill me, use me send me.”

If we had the time to go through the Judges that God used, we would find individuals who demonstrated great courage in key areas – areas that brought about great victory.

Like Othniel, we need individuals today who will be courageous when it comes to the Word of God.

Like Deborah, we need individuals today who will be courageous in the cause of God and encourage others to do the same.

Like Jael and Ehud, we need individuals today who will be courageous enough to confront the sin that is their life.

Like Gideon, we need individuals today who will be courageous enough to surrender to the Lord's wisdom and instruction.

Like Abimelech, we need individuals today who will be courageous and stand in defense of what God has blessed us with lest at any time we let them slip.

Like Jair and Abdon, we need parents today who will be courageous enough to raise up the next generation to carry on the work of the Lord.

Like Jephthah, we need individuals today who will be courageous enough to put the past in the past and move forward in unity with the people of God.

Like Samson, we need individuals today who will be courageous enough to get back in the battle after the Lord has had to bring you through something that brought you to the end of yourself and caused you to put your trust in the Lord.