



grow. pray. study.

October 26, 2025 Lead Courageously

Celebrating 35 Years and Looking Ahead

Psalm 23:1-4 (KJV), Joshua 1:9 (NRSV), 1 Corinthians 11:1 (CEB)

God's people can depend on God's presence

MONDAY 10.27.25 Isaiah 43:1-7

Leaving Egypt for freedom in the violent ancient Middle East, Israel called God the source of salvation (cf. [Exodus 15:1-3](#)). They saw it mainly as military/political freedom. When the Persian Empire freed Israel from decades in exile, the prophet most mainline scholars call "Second Isaiah" again called God savior. Now the key message was spiritual: God held to his side of their covenant despite their failures. * This deeper grasp of God's presence, not just God's power, shaped how God's people faced hardship.

- Today's reading (from Second Isaiah, which started at [Isaiah 40:1](#)) spoke first to Israelites returning from exile in Babylon. It emphasized God's personal bond with God's people—"I will be with you.... I love you." It did not promise an easy, pain-free life, but pledged that whatever happened, God's people could depend on God's presence. How could such a passage speak to people recovering from a long time of exile? How does it speak to you today?
- The Israelites saw empires rise and fall—Egypt, Persia, Rome. But at their best they placed their ultimate trust in God rather than these seemingly invincible powers. When you face uncertainty today, what "empires" (whether political movements, financial security, or cultural trends) compete for the trust that belongs to God alone (cf. [Psalm 2](#))? How does God's salvation work differently than human political or military power?

Prayer: Lord God, I see signs of your saving power in history, even though so many human rulers missed seeing you. And I see your saving power at work in my life, too. I claim you as my savior. Amen.

* "A further result will be to give Israel itself an even more spectacular experience of Yahweh's faithfulness and power, with the capacity to bring Israel itself to a renewed acknowledgment of Yahweh. There's no guarantee that Yahweh's plan will work.... Yahweh intends Israel to come to acknowledge him, but Israel will do so only in a partial way." —from John Goldingay, *Isaiah for Everyone*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2015, p. 164.

Lead Courageously Without Fear or Hatred

TUESDAY 10.28.25 Matthew 10:25-33

What does it take to “lead courageously”? A clear sense of a central Bible message is vital. “Which command is repeated most often in the Bible? You might imagine it’s something stern: Behave yourself! Smarten up! Say your prayers! Worship God more wholeheartedly! Give more money away! You’d be wrong. It’s the command we find in verses 26, 28 and 31: Don’t be afraid.” * Jesus modeled and taught his followers the importance of leaving behind the human tendency to be afraid.

- A common reaction to fear is to try to threaten the source of the threat. That was **not** Jesus' way—it just multiplies fear. “The demonic powers... greedy for the soul of God’s people are using their very desire for justice and vengeance as bait. The people of light are never more at risk than when they are lured into fighting the darkness with more darkness.” ** This happens when Christians meet threats with their own fear tactics. How can you defeat fear in a [Romans 12:21](#) way?
- There is another perilous misunderstanding of verse 28 in today’s reading. “Some people think that when Jesus urges us to fear the one who can destroy body and soul in hell, he is referring to God himself. But the point here is the opposite. God is the one we do not have to fear. Indeed, he is the one we can trust with our lives, our souls, our bodies, everything.” *** Fear and hatred destroy; God gives life and love. How must that shape your efforts to “lead courageously”?

Prayer: Loving Lord, in whatever ways I influence others, I want to always lead courageously in ways that draw others to your eternal kingdom of light and grace. Please guide me. Amen.

* Wright, N. T., *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 118). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

** *Ibid.*, p. 119. God does not defeat evil “with more darkness”: “The triumph of God in Christ is not the triumph of brute force, as if to assert a cosmic principle of ‘might is right.’ It is a triumph of grace in which divine love goes forth in sacrifice.” —from article “Triumph” in in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, general editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 899.

*** *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Speaking Truth Despite Opposition Spread the Gospel

WEDNESDAY 10.29.25 Acts 13:42-52

Leading courageously does mean speaking the truth of God’s inclusive good news clearly, even if people are not willing to hear it. Paul and Barnabas modeled that in verse 46 of today’s reading. “If you turn away from this message, declares Paul to the synagogue audience, then you are declaring that you don’t see yourselves as belonging to God’s coming new age! How can you do that? This is your ancestral hope, your dream, your future—and you’re rejecting it!” *

- Tragically, many religious leaders in the faith of Paul’s early life believed God’s truth was more about excluding people who didn’t fit with their personal beliefs about who God should love than it was about God’s love for all people. Paul’s willingness to include Gentiles (from pagan cultures) made them angry (verse 45). Many Christian groups have divided over similar differences through the centuries. Why does it take courage to include all people in God’s grace?
- Acts 13:46 used a long tongue-tangler of a Greek verb (“*parresiasamenoi*”) to describe Paul and Barnabas. According to Strong’s Concordance and Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, “this reflects an inner assurance expressed through courageous and frank speech, a key notion tied to the early Christian use of *parresia* — open proclamation of the gospel despite opposition.” ** How did their courageous leadership lead to “the Lord’s word” being “broadcast throughout the entire region”?

Prayer: Loving Lord, give me the type of confidence in you that leads to courageously sharing your love and grace in any setting, personal or group, where I have the opportunity. Amen.

* Wright, N. T., *Acts for Everyone, Part Two: Chapters 13-28* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 20). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

** From a search on *Perplexity.ai*.

Stand Firm, Be Brave, Love Always

THURSDAY 10.30.25 1 Corinthians 16:8-14

This is one of those passages we usually brush through. It's near the end of the letter. At one level, it details the apostle Paul's day-to-day plans, which we have no reason to care about. But verse 9 lets us see again Paul's courageous leadership in action. He knows there are "many opponents," but still sees not the opposition but "a big and productive opportunity" for his mission. And verses 13 and 14 invite all God's people to the virtues that help us "lead courageously."

- To grasp Paul's casual comment that "there are many opponents" in Ephesus, read [Acts 19:23-31](#). A whole amphitheater of Ephesian Greeks, in response to Paul's preaching of Jesus, angrily shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" In Acts 19, you'll see that Paul wanted to speak to that crowd, but the officials said **that** was too risky. How likely is it that Paul, seeing he had people's attention, saw that as the "big and productive" ministry opportunity that had "opened up"?
- Paul defined how Christians can lead courageously (verse 14). "They must never imagine that the gospel can be helped forwards by brute force, bullying or arrogance. 'Everything should be done in love'... has been the keynote of the whole letter, and Paul reminds them of it as he nears the close." * Firmness while leading with love takes God-given strength, fixed on principle without devaluing people. How might "standing firm in love" take more courage than being harsher and more aggressive?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, for your cause I want to stand firm, be brave and be strong. But help me always show those qualities in ways shaped and guided by your overarching principle of acting in love. Amen.

* Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 235). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Proclaiming Jesus Matters More Than Personal Status

FRIDAY 10.31.25 Philippians 1:12-18

Paul was in prison when he dictated his letter to Christians in Philippi (verse 13). That didn't deter him—"the things that have happened to me have actually advanced the gospel," he said. But he said some "Christians" were trying to cause him pain while he was in prison. Scholar William Barclay said, "There were those who preached the harder now that Paul was in prison. His imprisonment seemed to give them a heaven-sent opportunity to advance their own influence and prestige and lessen his." *

- Romans required soldiers to physically interact with "high value" prisoners, sometimes even handcuffed to the prisoner. When Paul said his imprisonment had "actually advanced the gospel," he seemed to be thinking, "Now I get to preach to all these Roman soldiers. They might never listen to me otherwise." Can you, like Paul, find bold, childlike joy and opportunity in events that at first may seem to be a reason only for despair or frustration?
- Then Paul said some people preaching Christ had "jealous and competitive motives." He could have defended his name or tried to shut down his critics. Scholar N. T. Wright said, "Paul's reaction is to celebrate. That's fine by me, he says. As long as people are going around saying that Jesus is the world's true Lord, I shall be happy." ** When someone else wins people to Jesus—even if you dislike their methods or motives—can you lead in true joy that God's work is advancing?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I like people looking up to me and treating me well. That's not wrong, but Paul's words remind me that how I'm treated is less important than seeing your message shared. Grow the great apostle's attitude in me. Amen.

* William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p.24.

** Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone, The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 90). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Run Life's Race with Courageous Endurance

SATURDAY 11.1.25 Hebrews 11:36-12:3

Hebrews 11 listed people whose courage led to rescue and others whose courage led to death. Both were examples of faith. God was with all of them, but faithful endurance regardless of results defines courageous Christian leadership, not outward success or personal safety. In the violent Roman Empire, the writer knew clearly that God didn't always stop evil's violence in its tracks. That's why, earlier, the writer said Jesus had "set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:15). That willingness to die rather than give up their loyalty to God frustrated the Roman persecutors. But it moved and inspired other people—the faith grew rather than shrinking under Roman persecution. Frederick Buechner said God's grace means, "Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us." * Their ultimate reward was not now, but in "a better country... a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16).

- Scholar William Barclay quoted F. R. Maltby: "Jesus promised his disciples three things—that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble." * Jesus led courageously not by avoiding pain but by meeting it with his eyes fixed on "the joy that was laid out in front of him." What lay beyond the cross defined his leadership more than the cross itself. So Hebrews said to "fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter," who "endured the cross." Christian thinker Dallas Willard wrote, "With this magnificent God positioned among us, Jesus brings the assurance that our universe is *a perfectly safe place for us to be*." *** Colossians 3:3 said, "Think about the things above and not things on earth. You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." In Christ, God puts your life safely out of the reach of all the world's evil. When you need to exert costly leadership, what "joy laid out in front of you," what vision of God's kingdom advancing, can keep you going?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to live a life of inner quiet and trust, no matter what storms may rage around me. Hold me safely in your arms to and beyond the end of my earthly life's journey. Amen.

* From <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/346052-the-grace-of-god-means-something-like-here-is-your>.

** William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 77.

*** Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Discovering our Hidden Life in God*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, p. 66.

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