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## Joshua 1:9

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Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.  
Do not be frightened; and do not be dismayed, for the  
Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

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“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened; and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

People talk a lot about manifesting these days: manifest your best life. Set your mind against fear, and you’ll arrive at peace. Clear your head, meditate with consistency, wait patiently, and your hopes will fulfill themselves. Unfortunately, Joshua 1:9 is often read in manifestation mode. Just like the season of Advent, we take God’s commandment to be courageous as something to muster up rather than something revealed to us. So we pull out our Christmas trees, we decorate the house, we feign cheer and good tidings, just as we attempt to manifest our own courage.

But God isn’t commanding Joshua to pull courage from thin air. Instead, the courage God commands—and the end of fear—is based on the surety of the promises that precede it:



Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you (Josh. 1:3-6).

This isn't the first time God has made this promise: "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you." From the very beginning, despite their rebellion and their fear, God has been with his people. He has sought them out (Gen. 3:9), he has remembered them (Gen. 8:1), he has blessed them (Gen. 12:1-3), he has delivered them from slavery, and he has gone before them (Deut. 31:3).

In the midst of your uncertainty, your terror, and the fight that is life, God does the same for you as he did for Joshua: he does not leave you, nor does he forsake you. He doesn't ask you to be courageous on your own. In this season of Advent, you are reminded that through a baby born in a manger, fear no longer has any power; you are his, and his strength is yours.

**Heavenly Father,**  
*remind me that no matter what battle I face,*  
*you will never leave me nor forsake me.*  
**Amen.**



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## Psalm 46:1-3

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God is our refuge and strength, a very-present help in  
trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth  
gives way, Though the mountains be moved into the  
heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though  
the mountains tremble at its swelling

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As we pass through the various stages of life, the phrase, “You are in trouble,” carries a different weight. As children, we fear being “in trouble” with our parents or a teacher. Getting “in trouble” is an ongoing temptation during our teenage years. Then, into our twenties, thirties, forties, and beyond, being “in trouble” can mean financial or marriage woes, depression or addiction, along with a lengthy list of other unwelcome experiences in which trouble is a very present reality.

What we need, daily and desperately, is a “very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). It sounds a bit awkward in English, but the Hebrew reads something like this: “a help in tight times he is greatly to be found.” In tight times, when the proverbial walls are closing in, we need that help that is “greatly to be found.” It is found, the psalm says, in “God [who] is our refuge and strength” (46:1).

Here’s the rub, though: God is not really “the Answer” we are looking for. Give us a strategy. Give us a to-do list. Give us a workout routine, yoga postures, breathing ex-



ercises, something, anything that *we can do* to deal with our troubles. But as helpful or unhelpful as some of those strategies may be, the psalmist says, “No. God is our refuge. God is our strength.”

His strength comes to us as a lowly babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes. His refuge is given to us in his weakness.

In Christ alone, the refuge of the troubled, the strength of the weary, we can say, “Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling” (46:2-3). We will not fear not because of *something in us* but because of *someone for us*. When walls are closing in, the outstretched arms of the cross stop them. When we are full of trembling, inside and outside, the empty tomb of our risen Lord of life preaches to us that no matter what, in Jesus, who came to us and who we now wait for again, all shall be well.

Because Jesus is our mighty fortress, “a helper who can always be found in times of trouble” (EHV), rather than cowering in fear, we stand and lift up our heads because we are the beloved children of God.

**Heavenly Father,**  
*when trouble seeks to overwhelm us, send your Spirit*  
*to carry us into Christ, our refuge and strength.*  
**Amen.**



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## Psalm 112:6-8

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For the righteous will never be moved; he will be  
remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his  
heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady;  
he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph  
on his adversaries.

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Psalm 112 can't properly be understood apart from Psalm 111. That's often the case in Scripture, but it's especially true here because Psalms 111 and 112 form an acrostic based on the Hebrew alphabet. They are literally connected by letters.

Psalm 111 is about God's faithfulness. Martin Luther cherished it and encouraged Christians to do the same. God is a God of his word. He will do what he says. His promise is sure. This is the foundation on which Psalm 112 builds.

Psalm 112 shifts our focus. It tells us about the person who trusts in the Lord, who holds God to his promises. This person is blessed. Nothing in the world compares to having God in his promises, which are fully embodied in his incarnate Son, Jesus, born of a virgin, and who lived, died, and rose for us. God's promise--Jesus--is secure, and therefore the person who trusts in him is, too.

“In the end, it will all be good. And if it isn’t good, it isn’t the end,” is a phrase that catches the spirit of our verses. Through trust in the God who is unmoved concerning what he has sworn, the righteous are unmoved as well. They are steady. And they will triumph in the end, because they are God’s and God always wins in the end. God never forgets, he loves to remember the righteous, and so the righteous are never forgotten.

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**TAKE HEART. KNOW YOUR GOD.  
KNOW THAT HE REMEMBERS YOU.**

Your God is the God of Psalm 111. Psalm 112 describes you because it describes Christ, in whom your life is hidden through faith, in whom you now have life and live. The goal is not to make Psalm 112 true of you. The point is to realize Psalm 112 is already true of you. We don’t actualize these words. We get used to them. So take heart. Know your God. Know that he remembers you. He graciously sees you, and in him you will see the end, which will be good, and if it isn’t good, it’s not the end yet.

**Lord Jesus,**

*you made God known to us by becoming man, as the  
incarnate Messiah. Grant that, in clinging to you, we  
may be unmoved and steady, even as you are,  
because we are yours.*

**Amen.**



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## Isaiah 8:12-13

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Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls  
conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in  
dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy.  
Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

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The goal of the Christian life is not to live fearlessly. Rather, it is to have the right kind of fear.

We live in a world rife with fear. The very air we breathe is thick with it. Everywhere we look, we hear people crying, “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!” It is the cry of the world, telling us that the universe will come crashing down if our preferred political candidate loses the race. It is the cry of our hearts, insisting that we won’t be okay if our social media post doesn’t perform well enough. It is the cry of the devil, whispering the toxic lie that our failures disqualify us from God’s love. Fear is everywhere: fear of judgment, fear of death, fear of failure, fear of war, fear of environmental disaster, fear of the past, fear of the future, fear of rejection. The list goes on.

The Christian response most often given to this problem is simple: Choose faith over fear. The problem, though, is that—left to our own devices—we’ll always choose fear



over faith. Our default setting is not dependence but independence. In other words, faith does not come naturally. Since the fall, our hearts are hard-wired to distrust God. There's a reason "Fear Not" is one of the most common phrases in all of Scripture. Even the bravest Christian warrior will lose courage in the face of an enemy big and scary enough: enemies like sin, death, and the devil.

Bravery, then, is not the solution. So what is?

The prophet Isaiah says, "Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy; he is the one you are to fear..." (Isa. 8:12-13a). God is reassuring his prophet that the fears infecting the people hold no staying power because God is bigger and stronger than them. Moreover, in Jesus Christ, the one who has tied up the strong man (Matt. 12: 29), God has demonstrated his solidarity with us. Our fears died with Jesus at the cross. He is for us, and "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31b).

**Gracious Heavenly Father,**

*forgive me when I fear the wrong things. Teach me to love  
and trust you most of all, so that the fear of the Lord would  
expel the lesser anxieties that daily plague me.*

**Amen.**



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## Isaiah 9:6-7

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For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his  
name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his  
government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne  
of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and  
forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

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The prophet Isaiah manages to squeeze into two verses the immeasurable hope of the world. The hope of peace? Yes. The hope of conquering fear? Yes. The hope of justice and righteousness? Yes. This hope of all people, of all times, everywhere is riding on the shoulders of a single man. This is not about a movement or institution. We are not banking on a revolutionary cause or governmental program. All eyes are on a child, a Son, who is born for us and given the name Jesus.

He is a Wonderful Counselor who, even as a twelve-year-old, amazed the teachers of the law with this understanding (Luke 2:47) and, as an adult, was the walking incarnation of wisdom. He is the Mighty God, fully divine with his Father, who “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). He is the Ever-



lasting Father in that he, with paternal love, beckons us to come to him, to receive from him compassion, forgiveness, and a place in the family of God. He is the Prince of Peace, who gives us peace “not as the world gives” (John 14:27), but a peace that “surpasses all understanding,” which guards our hearts and minds against all assaults from forces of evil (Phil. 4:8).

Isaiah says this regal child will sit “on the throne of David,” a fact confirmed when the angel Gabriel said to Mary that her child “will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32-33). Gabriel adds, “Of his kingdom there will be no end” (1:33), echoing what Isaiah had already said, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isa. 9:7).

In Christ, we are made part of this kingdom, baptized into its heavenly citizenry. He reigns over us in love. His throne is one of grace. All our hopes are in him, and in him, all our hopes are sure and certain.

**O Prince of Peace and Mighty God,**  
*the hope of all the ends of the earth, place over us your  
shield of love, shelter us from every danger, and keep us  
ever faithful as citizens of your kingdom of mercy.*

**Amen.**



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## Isaiah 26:3

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You keep him in perfect peace  
whose mind is stayed on you,  
because he trusts in you.

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Peace is a fleeting thing in this life. Every day, we are faced with events and circumstances that attack the very notion that everything is right. Peace is here one moment and gone the next. It feels neither perfect nor durable. And even if you manage to grab some semblance of peace for a short time, there is the looming reality that peace in this life is finite because life itself is finite. Death is coming for all of us. How, then, can we ever have perfect peace?

To understand what the Prophet Isaiah is saying in 26:3, you must go back to chapter 25, verses 8 and 9: “He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us” (Isa. 25:8-9).

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**THE PERFECT PEACE  
ISAIAH IS TALKING  
ABOUT COMES FROM  
OUTSIDE YOURSELF.**

The perfect peace Isaiah is talking about comes from outside yourself. It comes from hearing the promise that God has swallowed up death, taken away all your sins, and saved you. It is a gospel peace. It is a gift given to you. This peace does hide itself when life is hard or when temptation wins. This peace has promised never to leave nor forsake you. This peace is a person. This peace was born in Bethlehem. This peace is Jesus Christ, the perfect one, and your perfect peace.

**Heavenly Father,**  
*thank you for the peace that comes only from the work  
of your Son and help me to trust in all that you have  
promised me in him.*

**Amen.**



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## Matthew 8:26

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And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

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For a seasoned storm-chaser to fear for their life, the storm must be bad indeed. This was the case with the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. These experienced fishermen knew the water like the back of their hands, or at least they thought they did. But when evening came, the *sharkia* (Arabic for “shark”) winds for which Galilee is notorious swooped down and overwhelmed the little boat. They were caught in its jaws. At the mercy of the waves, the disciples’ fight-or-flight response kicked in, and they were tempted to give in to their most primal fears.

Fear works like this. It swoops in unexpectedly, threatening to undermine the objective truths of God’s promises. Caught in the jaws of our fears, our lizard brains kick in, and we are tempted to believe the most heinous of lies. “I may as well despair.” “God doesn’t love me.” “This storm is bigger and stronger than Jesus.” Like the disciples, we are brought to the end of ourselves and the only words we can muster are a paltry: “Save us, Lord; we are perishing” (v. 25). Yet, mercifully, these words are enough.



Jesus' response to his disciples' fears was immediate: "And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?' Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." The disciples were saved not because of their great faith but despite their lack of it. In fact, it was in their darkest hour that help arrived. His word, as always, proved to be truer and stronger than their anxieties. He rebuked the wind and the waves, casting the fear far from their hearts with his authoritative word.

When we were caught in the storm of our sin, God sent a manger-king to rescue us. This Word-made-flesh came in the darkest hour of night when all hope seemed lost: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone" (Isa. 9:2).

Jesus casts out the night in and around us, curb-stomps the monsters, and crushes the head of Satan. Caught in the grip of his grace, we are freed from the jaws of despair.

**Jesus,**  
*when sin threatens to overwhelm me, teach  
me to pray like the disciples: "Save me, Lord;  
I am perishing."*  
**Amen.**