

Joshua Lsn 1 Article

Twice during my years of ministry, I've been chosen to succeed distinguished and godly leaders and carry on their work. I can assure you that it wasn't easy to follow well-known Christians who sacrificially poured years of their lives into successful ministries. I can identify with Joshua when he stepped into Moses' sandals and discovered how big they were!

When I succeeded D.B. Eastep as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Covington, Kentucky, I remember how his widow and his son encouraged me and assured me of their support. I recall one of the deacons, George Evans, coming to the church office to tell me he would do anything to help me, "including washing your car and polishing your shoes." I never asked George to do either of those things, but his words expressed the encouraging attitude of all the church staff and leaders. I felt like a raw recruit taking the place of a seasoned veteran, and I needed all the help I could get!

Nearly a quarter of a century later when I succeeded Theodore Epp at Back to the Bible, I had a similar experience. The board and headquarters staff, the leaders in the overseas offices, the radio listeners, as well as many Christian leaders from all over the world, assured me of their prayer support and availability to help. When you feel like a midget taking the place of a giant, you appreciate all the encouragement God sends your way.

What a *new* leader needs is not advice but encouragement. "To encourage" literally means "to put heart into." General Andrew Jackson said "one man with courage makes a majority," and he was right.¹

A *wise* leader doesn't completely abandon the past but builds on it as he or she moves toward the future. Moses is mentioned fifty-seven times in the Book of Joshua, evidence that Joshua respected Moses and what he had done for Israel. Joshua worshiped the same God that Moses had worshiped, and he obeyed the same Word that Moses had given to the nation. There was continuity from one leader to the next, but there wasn't always conformity; for each leader is different and must maintain his or her individuality. Twice in these verses Moses is called God's servant, but Joshua was also the servant of God (24:29). The important thing is not the servant but the Master.

Joshua is called "Moses' minister" (1:1), a word that described workers in the tabernacle as well as servants of a leader. (See Ex. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28; Deut. 1:38.) Joshua learned how to obey as a servant before he commanded as a general; he was first a servant and then a ruler (Matt. 25:21). "He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander," wrote Aristotle in his *Politics*.²

What a promise God gave to Joshua! "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you" (Josh 1:5, NIV). God had given a similar promise to Jacob (Gen. 28:15), and Moses had repeated God's promise to Joshua (Deut. 31:1-8). God would one day give this same promise to Gideon (Jud. 6:16) and to the Jewish exiles returning from Babylon to their land (Isa. 41:10; 43:5); and David would give it to his son Solomon (1 Chron. 28:20). But best of all, **God has given this promise to His people today!** The Gospel of Matthew opens with "Emmanuel ... God with us" (1:23) and closes with Jesus saying, "Lo, I am with you always" (28:20, NKJV). The writer of Hebrews 13:5 quotes Joshua 1:5 and applies it to Christians today: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (NKJV).³

^{1 2 3} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong*. "Be" Commentary Series (19-21). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.