



THE BIBLE TOP

What do the five most searched, highlighted and shared Bible verses really mean? Are they sometimes misunderstood? These five famous Bible verses may not mean what many people think they mean, but like all of God's Word, what they truly tell us is so much more!

People can be funny about their pets. Pet adoption is up during this pandemic; one good news story. But people get carried away, I think. We pamper them sometimes. Maybe take it too far. It gets to where we wonder who is really in charge here. We have a couple in our neighborhood who pushes their dog on walks in a doggy carriage. I'm hoping the dog needs the help. But it gets to the point of wondering sometimes, hey, who's the master and who's the pet here? When it gets down to it, who is serving whom?

We are looking at the **Bible Top 5**. Five of the most searched, most quoted, most shared, most clicked verses in the Bible. What are people looking for in the Bible? What are they searching for? My theory is that the most popular verses are also most popularly misunderstood, and it's probably the misunderstood meaning that makes them so popular. But the truth is, the actual meaning is so much better. Today we look at Joshua 1:9, one of the most popular verses in Scripture. "Have 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" (Joshua 1:9). Wherever you go, don't be afraid, God is on your side. That can creep into a misunderstanding. God backs me up. Wherever I go, whatever I do, God backs me up. It's a lot like last week. "I can do all things." It's a wonderful verse, worthy of all this attention, but I'm concerned the popularity may be more for the misunderstanding than the understanding.

It comes down to this: Who is serving whom? Are you trying to enlist God for your agenda, or are you willing to be enlisted for God's agenda? Are you trying to sign God up to serve you, or are you willing to give your all to serve God? I think this is one of the hardest shifts to make. We all start out—I certainly did—thinking about the proposition of a life with God and asking, "How is this going to serve me? What kind of benefits package does this come with?" "God

will back me up" sounds like an awesome benefits package. I get God on my team, and God promises to throw all His power behind me? That sounds great. The misunderstanding makes the verse popular, but the true meaning is even better. God is not a member of your team. God is not awaiting your orders to see where to distribute His power and authority. To have a relationship with God is to have a relationship with, well, God—with God as God. We don't enlist God on our team. God enlists us on His. If Jesus is your co-pilot, move over! God doesn't work for you. But rich is the promise: "I will be with you." "The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua is next in line to lead. The book of Joshua begins where Deuteronomy left off, with the death of Moses. The people of God, first welcomed in Egypt around the time of Joseph, had descended into slavery until God called Moses to lead them out. Forty years after passing through the Red Sea and escaping the tyranny of Pharaoh they are on the brink of entering the Promised Land. But Moses will not enter. His was the liberation and the wilderness training. Now Moses is dead. "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'" (Joshua 1:1–2). You can't underestimate the weight of those words: Moses is dead. Moses was the leader of the people, the liberator, the mouthpiece of God, Moses of the Sinai Covenant and the Ten Commandments, the arm of God moving in miraculous strength to bring the whole people out of slavery. Moses is dead. It's not just the man. It's all he represents. If Moses is gone, what becomes of the plans and dreams and promises? "When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing" (Psalms 146:4). Moses is dead. Is God done with us? Aren't you tempted to

wonder sometimes? Is God done with us? Is God dethroned? Is God's authority and sovereignty meeting its match or coming to its limits? No. God is very much in control. God is in control of history, and nations, and all things. God will not leave you nor forsake you.

"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" (Joshua 1:5-6). "As I was with Moses," God says. Sometimes the best way to find encouragement for the future is to look to the past. It's certainly true for me. I've found myself learning about past pandemics and viruses. Then I find myself down in the basement of the church where the portraits of past pastors of First Pres hang in a row, and I look those guys in the eye and think about what it was like for them to lead a church through Spanish Flu or the Hong Kong Flu of 1968, or the Great Depression, or whatever. And they didn't have online services! "As I was with Moses, Joshua, in that same way I will be with you. My love has not come to an end. My promises do not fall void with the passing of Moses. My faithfulness endures to the generations, from generation to generation, from age to age, I will never leave you nor forsake you." Amen. So, Joshua, be strong and lead.

Joshua will need to be strong. What unfolds next is total war against the Canaanites. I'll be frank with you, it is one of my least favorite books to read. It is very hard for us to swallow total war, no survivors. The time is 1400 BC. Life is different. We know that the peoples of Canaan had horrible practices of child sacrifice and forced temple prostitution. It was, one scholar says, "a snake pit of detestable practices" ruthlessly exploiting the most innocent and vulnerable of the community to appease false gods. There was no higher power to appeal to, no League of Nations or Hague Tribunal. There was just Joshua and his band of ex-slaves. Even knowing all that, I find it

hard to read and a test of my faith when I have to trust that God's plan for the salvation of billions required such loss. Joshua will need to be strong, and he will often wonder if God is still there. "Be strong and courageous." It's a response of faith. I will believe in what I cannot see—that God is good and His promises are sure.

"Be strong and very courageous." God seems to need to repeat this a few times. I almost see Joshua shrinking with each word from God. "Be strong!" Eh... "Be very strong!" I dunno. Come on, Joshua, man up! "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" (Joshua 1:7-8). Along with the encouragement to be strong, to have faith, is the reminder to keep the law. Let me say a word about that. This is not God saying, "If you do my commands, I will be pleased and then do good things for you." That would set up the same kind of system of sacrifice and response that caused the Canaanites to throw their children into sacrificial fires or abandon them to temple prostitution. God doesn't operate by quid pro quo. It isn't "do this and I'll do that." This is God saying, "Look, I made this universe. I know how it works. If you follow my law, it will go well. If you run against my word, it's not going to work out great for you. So keep my word with you as you step and walk and make your way. My word is a gift. Be careful to do what is written in it. It will go well for you."

Then we get our famous verse. God backs me up whatever I do! Not exactly. "Have 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" (Joshua 1:9). Be strong. Have faith. Respond with courage. Believe what you don't yet see. I will be with you wherever you go. No, God is not saying,

"Let me join your team. You've never had a team member like me. Just wait until I get on your team!" God is saying, "I'm here. I'm in charge. I'm bringing my promises to bear and I will not be frustrated in my purposes. Now, take a deep breath, find courage, be strong, believe, and step forward. You will find when you do that wherever you step, I am already there." I don't enlist God in my plans; God enlists me in His.

"I will be with you," says the Lord. How can God be with us? How can God be with Joshua? The only way that promise can be kept is through Jesus. God is not a false idol waiting for a sacrifice and deciding how to respond. God does not operate as a quid pro quo. To be in relationship with God is to be in relationship with God as God. God does not participate in sin or commune with injustice and unrighteousness. Joshua will do many strong and courageous things. Joshua will also do many things counter to God's perfect and holy law. You and I will do many courageous things, and many things counter to God's perfect and holy law. Sometimes we will be brave. Sometimes we will be scared. Keep the faith. Be strong and very courageous, and keep believing.

How can God promise to be with Joshua? How can God promise to be with us? Only because Jesus, who lived a perfectly righteous life, gave His life on the cross for our sins so that we could be reconciled to God even though we are sinners. That's how. That's how God is with us, right now, in coronavirus, in national confusion and racial struggle, in our loneliness, and in our hopelessness, and in our fear, God is with us. God is with you. The actual meaning is even better than the misunderstanding. "Have 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" (Joshua 1:9).

STUDY GUIDE

THE BIBLE TOP 5 • "God Backs Me Up"

Joshua 1:1-9

UP:

UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Slowly, we are learning how to walk in a new atmosphere. Grace is the word. Grace. John opens his gospel saying, "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." Of all the peoples of the world, the children of God must walk in the grace of God if we are to reflect this core attribute of God. This summer the word is grace. In exactly the pace at which the Lord is leading you through Covid-19, may his grace abound to you.

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Joshua 1:1-9.

- 1) Who is God addressing in our passage this week and what is the context?
- 2) God charges Joshua with the same command three separate times. What is the command? Why do you think God repeats the command three times?
- 3) What do we learn from God regarding His Word ("the law" in Joshua's context) from verses 7 and 8? How does this apply to your own life today?

OUT:

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

4) In his sermon this week, Pastor Tim writes, "Who is serving whom? Are you trying to enlist God for your agenda, or are you willing to be enlisted for God's agenda? Are you trying to sign God up to serve you, or are you willing to give your all to serve God? I think this is one of the hardest shifts to make." This is one of the hardest shifts to make because we all start out with a tendency to presume we are "god," the fallen-induced symptom to presume that our way is the right way. How does joining God's team and God's mission, and not the other way around, shape your understanding of living on mission for God each and every day?

IN:

IN: Connect with Each Other

Joshua 1:9 contains an incredible promise of presence from God to Joshua, but in Matthew 28:20 we find that God's promise of presence is extended to all His children: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." This is one of the most bedrock promises in all of Scripture. God is with you. We sense God's presence to varying degrees at different times, but his promise is sure. Connecting with your circle, host a conversation on how you feel, and how you don't feel, God's presence with you in this season. Share your heart's requests around this topic and pray deeply together.