

Life Lessons

Doug Carver

Life Lessons | July 5, 2026 | Joshua 1; Zephaniah 3:17

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Good morning, Champion Forest. I'm so honored to be with you this morning. I'm sorry my bride of 53 years can't be with you. It's hard to believe - 53 years. That's a long time. But I took that little 18-year-old - I was 21 years old - and we left Georgia, and we really haven't gone back for 53 years. I'm just so thankful she survived that long journey. We're still together.

I want to thank the families of those of you who have supported your loved ones as you've kept the home fires burning, and those of you who grew up in military families. It's a unique tribe. As we've shared, one of the most unreached people groups in the United States is our military communities. I pray that you'll pray for our troops. Pray to invest your time and energy with them.

We look at our chaplains as being mobile missionaries as they go all over the world, share God's Word, and really equip the saints. Many, many of our troops will meet Jesus for the very first time.

I was reflecting this morning again, Pastor Jarrett, Pastor Jeff, and I'm just full this morning. Thank you for allowing me to be here. I've spent a lot of my July Fourths away from my family, and this is another one of those. Thank God for FaceTime. I was able to watch my wife. They were doing fireworks in Augusta, Georgia, where my daughter is, and I'm watching the drone attack here in Houston over at the CityCentre. It was quite interesting.

I'm thankful this morning that I have an opportunity, as one of 44 million who have ever worn the uniform in 250 years. We have quite a legacy as a military, and I have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the members of the armed services, many of whom don't get such an opportunity. I'm humbled. That's why I'm a little choked up this morning. I have an opportunity to speak on behalf of this family of Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Space Force, and Auxiliary. It's been quite a blessing, so thank you for allowing me to speak here this morning.

It's a costly profession to be in the armed services. You leave home, and you're away from family and the familiar. In many cases, you experience things that human beings should not experience - some of the horrors, challenges, and chaos, especially of combat.

Forty-four million have worn the uniform. We've lost one million who have paid the supreme sacrifice for our freedoms. Even today, I think of the 88,000 missing in action. That's something I hope you'll pray about, that those individuals can come home and there can be closure for their loved ones.

I think of those who suffer amputations as a result of combat, and those who suffer the invisible wounds of

war, which you may or may not be aware of, but it does something to you. Those who struggle with post-traumatic stress or mild traumatic brain injury. Pray for the members of our armed services.

We've mentioned all the services this morning, but I want to mention a group this morning who have never gotten their parades and accolades like they should. I know they don't like us to do it, but I was on college campuses in the late '60s and early '70s, and I know how our men coming back from Vietnam were treated with disrespect. Many of them, after they came back from combat in Vietnam and Cambodia, took their uniforms off and put them away. They didn't want anybody to know, just because of the way they were treated.

But we've changed some things now. You have some Vietnam veterans here in this room today, and I'd just like to honor them by asking: If you're a Vietnam veteran or Vietnam-era war veteran, would you stand so we can honor you, please?

We just say, "Welcome home. Welcome home."

Joshua's Assignment

I'm going to be preaching from Joshua chapter 1 this morning. I know it's a familiar passage with many of you. I'll ask you to turn to that now. I'm preaching from the English Standard Version. This is God's Word for the people of God.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.

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.

Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

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."

— Joshua 1:1-9

May God bless the reading and the hearing of His Word.

Father, I ask You to take these next few moments and use them for Your glory. Father, You know the reason why I was asked to be here this morning. You know why this assembly is here, this unique assembly. And so, Father, would You have Your way? Would You convict us of sin, righteousness, and Your judgment? And most of all, Lord, would You be lifted high? In Jesus' name, amen.

Twenty-three years ago, I was down in a place called Grafenwöhr in southern Germany, Bavaria. We were gathered for our dress rehearsal and final instructions before we deployed to Iraq. There was a major, secret meeting. I remember attending it, or at least almost bribing my way into the meeting. Primarily, I wanted to hear how to pray for our military commanders who were going to send our troops into harm's way.

The senior commander stood up and told all of us the challenges that were ahead of us. It was going to be a surprising war. We did not know what we were facing. We had heard that Saddam Hussein perhaps had nuclear capability and might use it, or that he had biological or chemical agents on his FROG missiles that would be deployed out of the Euphrates River.

As I listened to this, it was like something out of the book of Revelation. We were told a projection of how many battle casualties we would have and where all those body bags were going to be for distributing across our nation. We were told how this would change America and our fabric, and that this was not a 100-hour war like Desert Shield and Desert Storm, but that this was perhaps a 30-year war, which was almost true.

After this speech, you could almost feel a heavy weight in the room. The commander asked if there were any questions about what he had just said. Nobody moved. You could hear a pin drop. Then he looked at me and said, "Chaplain, what do you have to say?"

Well, I did not go into this room with a prepared speech or remarks about what this general was going to say. I certainly didn't go in there with a sermon or a text. But it was one of those moments when God promises us that when we are in places, perhaps standing before kings, tribunals, judges, and generals, He will fill our mouths with what needs to be spoken for the occasion.

As I began walking from the back bleachers, if you will, down to the front of the meeting, God had me share some words. I don't even remember them. They were nothing that you would write down in a history book. But I do remember the Scripture that just fell off my lips as I was looking at these concerned national leaders:

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.

— Joshua 1:9

I want you to think about some of those impossible situations and assignments, like I had that day with these generals, but like they were also facing. I don't think any of them had on their military records that, at a particular point in time in 2001, our nation would change after we were attacked by terrorists on 9/11, and that we would be preparing to engage a formidable foe in Iraq once again. But that was our assignment.

Here's an assignment that was given to Joshua. In some respects, we know it was coming because Moses had told Joshua in earlier chapters of the book of Deuteronomy, "It's about to be your turn. I'm about to retire. It's about to be your turn." In Deuteronomy chapter 34, once more, that call for this assignment comes.

I'm trying to think about what was going through Joshua's mind here. He was about to follow a superstar of prophets. There was no one like Moses. In Deuteronomy chapter 34, here's a prophet, and there's not been one like him - one whom the Lord spoke with face to face. None like him because of the signs, miracles, and wonders that he had performed. None like him with all of the mighty power and the great deeds of terror that Moses had inflicted upon Egypt. And yet God tells Joshua, "Now it is your turn."

My message here in these next few moments is that I want you to think about that challenging assignment, that situation, that impossible task that has just fallen into your lap. Now it's your turn.

You've seen others walk through that long, dark night of the soul. You've seen other individuals struggle with the afflictions of this fallen creation. But in some cases here in this room, you take this personally because now it's your turn. That challenging assignment.

Then I'm going to talk for a few moments about how we can walk through that assignment, because God has made a promise to us. He has committed to us that He will walk with us. He will carry us through those challenging moments in our lives.

Thirdly, I'll conclude with the only thing that you and I need to do in Christ as we go through those challenges. All He asks us to do is, in faith, to be courageous and confident, knowing that He who began a good work in us, regardless of what it is, will bring it to completion. Not the circumstances, not the challenges, not the affliction, but God will bring to completion what He has for all of our lives.

Now It's Your Turn

Here's Joshua. Egypt is behind you. The Jordan River is flooded ahead of you. There's no telling what's going to happen in the Promised Land. It's full of danger, disaster, and defeat. Joshua has about 600,000 whiners who don't have a good track record of obeying God. They don't know how to follow orders. And yet God tells him, "Now it's your turn."

Life is full of those challenging moments. As I mentioned earlier, some of us are struggling here in this room with them. You're saying, "Why is this happening to me? Why is God blasting me with bad news? Why do I have such lousy neighbors? Why is my marriage so difficult? God, can You tell me once again why You put me with this spouse? Why are my children so rebellious? Why don't they just get it? Why do I have a child in the far country? God, why did You give me this hardship? Why me? Why is my loved one facing health challenges, and the more I pray, the worse they get? Lord, why are You testing my faith?"

Brothers and sisters, in this fallen creation in which we live, that's life. It's a challenge. Jesus said:

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

— John 16:33

So there should be no surprise.

There was a July Fourth in 2007. I'm having a July Fourth celebration at the quarters of the Chief of Staff of the Army. My wife and I are there with a four-star general. I'd never been there before that time, and I haven't

been invited back. It was a very interesting evening. It was wonderful.

While I was sitting out on the porch getting ready to watch the fireworks over Washington, D.C., a young soldier came up to me, walking with a cane. His name was Greg Gadson. Greg is a graduate of the United States Military Academy, class of 1989. His wife is also a graduate, class of '89.

Greg said, "Chaplain, I'm struggling with something. Several months ago, my unit engaged the enemy, and we hit an IED, an improvised explosive device. It left two of my soldiers dead. I remember waking up, leaning against my smoking Humvee, bleeding out."

He said, "I lost 121 units of blood. They had to replenish the blood that I'd lost, and they said that I died six times."

He said, "Chaplain, I've got to make a decision here as I go to Walter Reed in a day or so. They want to take off my left leg, a high cut above the knee."

Greg was an athlete. He played for the West Point football team, so that was a challenge for him.

He said, "The other, right leg is so full of shrapnel that they recommend I just have it taken off because of all the surgeries that I will have. Chaplain, what do I need to do?"

What a challenging assignment. Here's a young officer destined to make general - at least one, two, three, maybe four stars. An athlete, a good-looking guy, and he had a great family. Now, all of a sudden, there's a major change and shift in his life. Like Joshua as he's replacing Moses, it's his time. Like Greg Gadson, his life is dramatically changed.

Several months later, I remember going to Walter Reed in November for Thanksgiving to visit those in the wounded warrior section, and I heard, "Hey, Chaplain, come walk with me!"

Here's Greg on his new legs, instilling such courage and confidence among those soldiers around him who were still dealing with their wounds. Some of them just didn't have the courage to stand up with their new legs or use their new arms.

How do we deal with those challenging, impossible tasks when we realize that it's happening to us, not to someone else? These are the moments when you need to remember that with God all things are possible. If we try to do things under our own strength, it really is impossible.

In many, many cases, we're going to have some of those challenging assignments or seasons of our lives that really bring us to our knees and test our very faith in Jesus Christ. It's in those times that God will remind us that His grace is sufficient for our every need. When we are weak and we recognize it, we can also recognize how strong He will be in our lives.

Sometimes God assigns us trials beyond our understanding so that through them we can realize things such as suffering will produce endurance, endurance will produce character in our lives, character will produce hope, and hope will never disappoint us.

These challenging things that hit our lives, which are part of the fallen creation we all live with until Jesus comes back, will take us out of our comfort zones. They will often lead us to pray as the psalmist did in Psalm 73:

*Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*

*My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

— Psalm 73:25-26

God Promises to Walk With Us

Here's the good news. As you're dealing with some challenging issue, task, situation, or problem in your life for which there seems to be no solution or no letup, God promises to walk with us, to carry us, and to deliver us through it. That's His commitment to us.

To Joshua, the Lord said, "Now it's your time to lead, and I'm with you. I've given you every place where you place your foot. No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you as I was with Moses. I won't leave you or forsake you. Don't be afraid or discouraged. I will be with you wherever you go."

I hope you find comfort in that promise from God, as I know Joshua did. His commitment to us as His children is that He will always be with us. We will never be left to our own devices. He will never leave us or forsake us.

The psalmist recognized this in Psalm 23. David says:

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me.*

— Psalm 23:4

The prophet Isaiah puts it this way in chapter 43:

Fear not, for I am with you.

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned.*

— Isaiah 43:1-2

Jesus said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." He said, "I promise I will leave you a Comforter, and He will guide you into all truth. He will convict you of sin, righteousness, and judgment. I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

Regardless of the challenging assignment you're struggling and wrestling with right now, regardless of the trial that our sovereign God has allowed, although you feel so lonely and alienated, remember that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

He reminds us that regardless of our human situation, He is with us always. Nothing will separate us.

One of the loneliest moments in all of creation was when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hung on a tree at Calvary, hanging on the cross to die for our sins. Think about what it cost Him. The task that He was given before the foundation of the world, when God said, "I'm going to send Jesus Christ to reconcile, to redeem, to pay the price for our sins so that you and I might walk in freedom."

The Scripture says that He experienced the wrath of God, our sins upon His back, so that we might be free. If we are free in Christ, we are free indeed. Yet it cost Jesus His life for you and for me. He experienced it. He even cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

When we began the attack on Iraq, I believe that I walked through the valley of the shadow of death. One particular day, perhaps more than that, our unit began to experience a number of theater ballistic missiles that had been fired all over Kuwait, where our assembly areas were.

It was an interesting experience, to say the least. I'd never had a missile fired at me, so who knows how you're going to react? I do know that my unit - most of us - went quickly, briskly. We did not run, I don't think, to our concrete bunkers to wait until a Patriot missile knocked it out in less than two minutes.

Do you know how much you can pray in two minutes as you're waiting for some good news?

I remember sitting in that crowded bunker with young men and women who were young enough to be my sons or daughters, and I was praying about my own life. Would I see my family again? Would I survive the blast? I remember thanking the Lord for my salvation, His forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternity.

Sometime during my prayer in the chaotic events of the battlefield, I prayed for those around me. I didn't know what their prayer lives were like, but I was praying for those beside me.

I was told later by a Patriot missile commander that it was only about 19 seconds from when the enemy launched a missile until the Patriot took it out. But it seemed like an eternity.

Are you in a place right now where it seems like time has stopped? Have you been there as you wait for God to show up, save you, and get you out of this dilemma?

Please tell me there are testimonies in this room - those events that have occurred, those situations when it seemed like all hope was lost, and yet God showed up. He showed up in the form of a person, perhaps, who ministered to you. He showed up, perhaps, in a Scripture that soothed your aching soul. He showed up in something unexpected, His Holy Spirit ministering to you.

I'll tell you what happened to me in the bunker. As I was waiting there and trying to stay calm and confident in this challenge, God dropped into my heart a Scripture that I had just memorized prior to deploying to Iraq:

*The Lord your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.*

He will take great delight in you,

*he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.*

— Zephaniah 3:17

As I sat there, in what seemed to be an eternity, that Scripture calmed my soul.

One of the things that also occurred in this very short period of time was that I began hearing an old song that my family sang when I was a kid. It's my dad's favorite: "And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry here in this bunker, none other has ever known."

The peace of God that passes all understanding rested on me. It arrested the fear and the concern, even allowing me to come out of my own creature comfort to look at those around me with an encouraging countenance as we all got through that brief challenge.

Listen, regardless of what's going on in your life, in spite of that tough assignment God's given to you, even though you feel so alone and that no one knows as you're going through this fight of faith, the Lord our God sees you.

I was leaving the hotel this morning, and one of the valets - I didn't use valet, by the way. I did my own parking. But I had watched one of the valets at the hotel and the way he attended to others. Although I didn't need to, I gave him a small gift because I said, "I want you to know, young man, I see you this morning and the hard work you're doing to satisfy the customers here at the hotel."

I want all of you to know - some of you who feel so alienated and far from God, and perhaps you've not even shared the aches of your heart and soul - please hear this. That's why the Lord sent me here. The Lord sees you. Jehovah Roi. The Lord sees you.

The Lord knows the assignment, the task that He has allowed to come your way, and He is there with you. He's your ever-present help in times of trouble, and He'll always be with you to the end.

Be Strong and Courageous

What are we supposed to do as we have these challenges? You've got it. The Lord has promised to be with you. What are you to do as an individual?

It's very simple. The Scripture says we're to trust God. We're to be courageous and strong, not to fear or be discouraged.

Courage is defined as the quality of mind that enables us to encounter danger and difficulty with boldness and without fear.

God was telling Joshua in his new assignment, "No, you're not Moses. Moses is dead. He was the rock star. But Joshua, now it's your time."

He says, "Hold on. In spite of the challenges, have faith that I'm going to do immeasurably more in your life than you could ever ask or think."

That's what the Lord reminds us today. Don't be intimidated by the enemy or the situation. Don't be threatened when something impossible has been given to you and has fallen into your lap. Don't allow discouragement to take your eyes off Jesus, beat you down, or tell you to just throw in the towel and quit.

Have courage that God is at work in your life and in your circumstances. He is with you. He is for you. He will never forsake you. Trust the Lord God, who is faithful and true.

I've often been asked, "What was one of your worst assignment challenges when you were the Chief of Chaplains? You had 2,900 chaplains, 1.2 million soldiers, 800,000 family members, 300,000 Department of Defense civilians, and a war in two places, Afghanistan and Iraq. What was your challenge?"

One of my greatest challenges was August 30, 2010. That was the day I received a phone call that one of our Army chaplains had been killed in action in northeastern Afghanistan. He was the first U.S. Army chaplain, the first military chaplain, killed since the Vietnam War.

My responsibility was to call his wife and give our condolences as the United States Army, and also on behalf of the president of the United States. That was a hard phone call, I want you to know.

When I called Christie, before I was able to give my condolences, she said, "I want to tell you how my day's been."

I thought, "I can only imagine how your day has been."

She said, "When that polished black sedan pulled up in front of my quarters, I thought they were coming to the wrong place. They were looking for directions. Yet they got out in their uniforms and knocked on my door to give me the news that my husband was not coming home."

She said, "Chaplain, let me tell you what happened to me after that. I fell to my knees, and the strangest thing came out of my mouth. I didn't cry first. I didn't wail and scream. My first reaction was these words":

*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
blessed be the name of the Lord.*

— Job 1:21

She said, "All I could do at that moment, when my world fell apart, was bless God, who's the giver of every good and perfect gift."

Brothers and sisters, in these days in which we live, I don't know how this is all going to turn out. I pray for a revival. I do pray for a spiritual awakening. We are overdue.

But we also should be looking toward heaven, setting our eyes on the completion of this world through our faith in Jesus Christ, who's coming again soon. May He come today. Maranatha.

Let's look unto Jesus. Jesus Christ told His disciples, "You're going to have challenges in this world. You're going to have trouble, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."

Brothers and sisters, in spite of what you may be going through, regardless of how painful it is, look to the

cross and be reminded that Jesus suffered, and we are engaged with Him in that fellowship of suffering.

He had no greater assignment, no more costly task in all the world, than to die for our sins. Yet He survived. And as we've sung so beautifully this morning, He has overcome death, hell, and the grave. He holds the keys.

Even as He hung on the cross, He cried, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. It is finished."

Brothers and sisters, now it's your turn, just as it was with Joshua. Whatever task is going on under the auspices of a sovereign Creator, a faithful Creator God, He promises to be with you in it and through it.

He's in the process of deepening your faith, strengthening you, and maturing you as you go through the fire. James says we are to count it all joy when these things come upon us because a testimony is brewing and being developed in your life, so that you can say to others who are struggling:

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

— 1 John 4:4

Keep your eyes on Jesus:

Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

— Hebrews 12:2

He's interceding. He's praying for you and me as we go through these hard challenges and times.

Look to the Lord, who is there. He sees you. He is with you. Have courage and be confident.

Keep Moving

Let me close with this. I was thinking about another one of our great military heroes, Travis Mills. I doubt if any of you in this room have heard of him.

In 2012, Travis Mills was on his third deployment into combat. He was a young 31-year-old. He didn't have to go on this one, but he said, "I have to be there with my boys."

He'd gotten to a place where they were going to do a search and seizure in a village. He took his backpack off and set it right down on an explosive.

When he awoke, he was in Walter Reed Hospital. The explosion had taken his legs and his arms. He's one of five quadruple-amputee veterans today.

Travis said that as he struggled and woke up with all the pain, "If I could have killed myself, I would have done it. But I couldn't. I didn't have any arms to strangle myself or stab myself."

He said, "There was this one nurse. She kept coming in there and putting what appeared to be a Scripture on my night table. Of course, I couldn't pick it up and read it, and I wasn't going to ask anyone to read it for me."

He said, "I remember struggling with God. Why have You put me through this hell?"

In his book, **Tough as They Come**, Travis said that one day, after he and the Lord got to speaking again, he asked the nurse to read whatever was on that piece of paper she had written down for him.

It was his life verse that he had memorized as a young child. It was what drove him as an athlete. It's what drove him as he went into the horrors of combat:

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.

— Joshua 1:9

Travis said, "At that moment, I realized that, for a reason only God will share with me in eternity, my new assignment was to be a quadruple amputee."

He developed the desire to get off that hospital bed, which he did. He's got new legs and new arms, and he serves at a place in Maine that was given to him by the Elizabeth Arden cosmetics industry. They had a mansion there.

Do you know what he does now? He encourages his fellow veterans who are struggling with the new tasks and assignments they've been given.

He tells them two things. One, he tells them, "Keep moving. Don't stop." The other thing he shares with them is this life verse that I've just shared with you this morning, Joshua 1:9.

So, brothers and sisters, wherever you are, in the words of Travis Mills, one of our great heroes, keep moving. Don't stop.

Yes, it might be tough, but the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. He's with you now, and He will be with you to the end.

You can take that to the bank. It's the promise. This is the Word of God.