

# Living... Strong and Courageous

By Katy Gifford



Have I not  
commanded  
you? Be strong  
and courageous.  
Do not be afraid,  
and do not be  
discouraged, for  
the LORD your God  
will be with you  
wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

Our family gathered in an airport terminal on a sunny August day in 2016. We were there to see our son Luke off to basic training in the U.S. Army. Our family of seven would not be together again for quite a while. We had known this was coming for months. We knew we would live through it. But, it hurt my heart.

A common phrase I said then, and now, was, "My heart isn't breaking, but it sure is stretching." I knew that what we were going through wasn't going to be the end. It was a beginning. My heart wouldn't break, but it would get used to the stretch. I knew there would be more times to watch him leave, and I was already looking forward to his coming back home.

When Luke left, our family adopted Joshua 1:9 as our theme verse: *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, and do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.* As we drove home with an open spot in the mini-van, I realized being an "Army Strong Mom" was going to take a lot. I didn't talk much on the trip because I figured that would only cause tears for me and maybe my husband and our other children as well. So I kept saying, "Be strong and courageous, be strong and courageous," over and over again.

Letters written to Fort Benning, Facebook posts, even phone conversations were peppered with BSAC ... be strong and courageous. We said the words, wrote the words, and now we continue to learn the words.

Being strong and courageous is not about digging deep inside myself to muster a face that looks strong to the onlooker. It isn't about never shredding a tear or being a little off when I am discouraged. Being strong and courageous isn't about anything I can do. It's nothing that even my husband and our family can band together and do. Being strong and courageous, for me, is letting God be my strength and letting God be my courage.

Luke has reminded me several times of the story of Joshua and how God used him even when it wasn't quite how Joshua thought things would go. He didn't think he should be the leader when he was only ready to be the helper. Just like Joshua had no clue what God was leading him to do, we really have no idea how things are going to go for Luke as he serves his first deployment this year. We don't know what he will encounter or how this experience will change our son.

But we do know that Luke is not just our kid. He's God's kid. In Baptism, Luke became a child of our heavenly Father. We got to raise him. We helped him, and his siblings, learn to walk, talk, ride a bike, and told them to "do your best for Jesus" in whatever they tried. But our kids, whom I call "the Blessings," are truly the Lord's and we have been honored to have been given the strength and courage God needs us to have as we nurture them.

God has taught me not to be afraid. He has taught me that having our son wrapped in prayer by family, friends, and so many LWML sisters is a comfort. He has taught me to be strong and courageous through His strength and courage. And I know, without a doubt, that the Lord is with Luke, and all of us ... wherever we go. Q