Joshua -Moving Under God’s Direction

Introduction

June is often a month marking new beginnings, new direction, new possibilities. May, with all its graduations and end-of-semester experiences, is past. June becomes the time to put the learning from past years into practice. June is also the most popular month in the US for weddings, for moves by families to a new area, for starting new jobs, often in a new community, etc. It is a time of transition. Yet those very new beginnings can be a source of anxiety and insecurity. Will I have what it takes? Will I succeed in my new job, my new location, my new relationships?

Joshua’s new beginnings were to take the nation of Israel into the Promised land which God had promised to them through Moses. Joshua has amazing stories with more successes than failures. The Bible is full of such stories of people’s responses to God’s initiatives and what God has done. These stories speak to our own hearts and can anchor our faith. Even agnostics recognize that.

One agnostic couple, who were evolutionists, made this interesting observation – all the more poignant in light of the evolution vs. intelligent design debate. They said: “You can't teach disbelief to a child, only wonderful stories, and we didn't have a story nearly as good. Evolution is devoid of heroes. You can't say to your child, "Evolution loves you." The story stinks of extinction, and nothing exciting happens for centuries. I didn't have a wonderful story for my child”(*Stephen Dunn, “At the Smithville Methodist Church)*, so they sent their little girl to the local vacation Bible school!

May we have a childlike faith that hears and believes the stories of what God can do!

**Joshua’s Story – Chapter One**

I have always treasured Joshua’s story and believe it has much to teach us in our world today, so this will be the focus of my scattered flock meditations and occasional sermons for the church this summer. His story opens with his call and the secrets of his success in chapter 1. Let’s look at the first 9 verses and then see how God’s leading of Joshua applies to us.

But before that, we need to know Joshua’s backstory. There are two dominant clues. First, when Canaan was promised to the Israelites under Moses, Joshua was Moses’ assistant. Moses would meet God and talk to the Lord face to face in the tent of meeting, and Exod. 33 tells us that Joshua the son of Nun was there in the tent with him. But even after Moses would return to the camp, Joshua did not leave the tent (33:11). He was learning to know God personally. Second, when Moses sent out 12 spies to case out the new promised land, Joshua was one of those spies. He and Caleb were the only two who believed God and did not fear the obstacles of taking the land. So Joshua, like Caleb, outlived the adult generation who died in the wilderness because of unbelief. After Moses died, God appointed Joshua to be the leader of the people. He had demonstrated his desire to know and follow God. He had stood for God’s plans against the leaders of his own generation as one of the 12 spies. He had trusted God to do what God had promised.

Still, his calling was daunting. With Moses he had seen the rebellion of the people – against Moses himself but also against God. As a military man, he also knew that the promised land was already occupied by enemy tribes and peoples. They would have to be conquered for Israel to take the possession God had promised. Plus, the Israelites weren’t even in the promised land yet. There was a mighty river between them and the land Joshua was to lead them into. A daunting obstacle just to get started.

**First, the promises**

So God gave Joshua the promises he needed to go forward on God’s lead. These are in the first nine verses of chapter one:

1 After the death of Moses the Lord’s servant, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ assistant. He said, 2“Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. 3I promise you what I promised Moses: ‘Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you— 4from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+1%3A1-9&version=NLT#fen-NLT-5832a)] in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.’ 5No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.

6“Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. 7Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. 8Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. 9This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you og.” Joshua 1: 1-9 NLT

Notice how God told Joshua 3 times to be *strong and courageous* – because God will be with him – because God will give the land to the people – because God will never leave him nor forsake him (Josh.1: 2-9). Those are amazing promises, beloved. They remind me of Christ’s parting commission to his disciples and to us: *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Mt.28:18-20). God does not give us a task for His kingdom and leave us out there to do it by ourselves. He promises to be with us and be our power and strength.

**Then, the condition**

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| But, there was one condition for Joshua and it remains today as the secret of success, “Study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed,” (v.8, NLT). The secret of success is knowing and keeping God’s Word. God promised to be with Joshua, but in order to trust God in the daily matters of leading his people, he needed to know God well. He was to study God’s Word – to meditate on it day and night and be careful to do everything it said. J.I Packer says,)“Meditation is the activity of thinking over, dwelling on, and applying to oneself the various things one knows about the works, ways, purpose and promises of God. … Its purpose is to …let God’s truth make its full impact on one's mind and heart.” (J. I. Packer, Knowing God, InterVarsity Press, 1973, pp. 18-19). | |
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Meditation on the Word of God is essential to a thriving relationship with Jesus Christ. And so it raises the bar on the kind of religious practice that some people think is acceptable: “James Kelley of Washington, D.C., is one of a small group at his local church who are enthusiastic Episcopalians, but who do not believe in God. Said Kelley, ‘We all love the incense, the stained-glass windows, the organ music, the vestments and all of that. It's drama. It's aesthetics. It's the ritual. That's neat stuff. I don't want to give all that up just because I don't believe in God,’" (Derek Helt, "Go With the Flow," *SermonNotes.com).* But they’re missing the point. Liturgy, organ music, praise music, color, and pageantry are to lead us to worship the God behind it all. And to do that you must learn who God is – through God’s Word.

The Bible reveals the whole character and purpose of God and teaches us how to live. Thus meditation on the scripture helps us to recognize the voice of the Lord. It helps the truth of God stick in our minds – “like a garment or anything else that is dipped again and again in vats to retain color a great while,” (Philip Henry, Leadership, Vol. 5, no. 1).

Meditation also helps us align our will with God’s will. As Henrietta Mears has said, “When God gives a command or a vision of truth,it is never a question of what He will do, but what we will do. To be successful in God's work is to fall in line with God’s will and to do it God’s way,” (Henrietta Mears in Dream Big: The Henrietta Mears Story. Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 7).

Joshua had learned to know his God. He studied God’s word, meditated on it and was careful to obey it. He learned to obey God’s directives so he could follow them even when they did not make sense militarily. As one commentator has said “Joshua was a brilliant military leader and a strong spiritual influence. But the key to his success was his submission to God. When God spoke, as God still does through His Word and the Spirit, Joshua listened and obeyed,” (*NLT – life application notes, p. 308*).

It seems like such a simple condition, but like so many of God’s directives, it can catch us by its all encompassing requirement. He was to “study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it” (Josh. 1:7). Really?

It’s these superlatives that I believe challenge us today. Continually? Day and Night? Obey all? What’s your response to the totality of obedience these words signify? I am reminded of the Great commandment – “to love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength” (Luke 10:27). It was this commandment that convicted me of sin. I was a moral, religious person, but even before I knew God personally I knew instinctively that God had me on the alls. That was my first understanding of sin. The alls. I think this condition of success in following God’s directives for our lives is the same. We may be doing all sorts of things right – in our eyes, the eyes of others and perhaps in God’s eyes too, but for God’s version of success, we need the Spirit’s empowerment to fulfill the alls. We need to deal with our constant busyness.

**Busyness**

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| There is hardly ever a complete silence in our soul. God is whispering to us well-nigh incessantly. Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul, or sink low, then we hear these whisperings of God. He is always whispering to us, only we do not always hear, because of the noise, hurry, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on. —Frederick W. Faber (1814-1863) |

*Busy*. A horrible word. . . Someone has said that a bore is someone who, when you ask her how she is, tells you. A bigger bore is someone who, when you remark that he is busy, details how busy he is and with what activities. I sometimes do that; few of us live up to the standards we promote in our own advice. But I think "busy" means being egotistic and arrogant--believing the world needs me so much. It means being inhospitable; I regale you with how much work your presence demands of me, how intrusive you are. I play God. I imply that you are less important if you are less busy. It's hard to expunge "busy" from the vocabulary, but it helps to remember its use is offensive (*Martin E. Marty in The Christian Century (Dec.7, 1988). Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 3).*

“I have asked three close friends to monitor me and tell me when I am allowing busyness to crowd out fellowship with God” (C. John "Jack" Miller in Leadership, Vol. 10, no. 4).

That’s wise advice, beloved. I pray that God so rearrange our priorities and reignite the passion of our hearts that we choose to meditate on His Word day and night, we choose to study His word every day, we choose to memorize it and cherish it, we choose to talk about it with others and sing praise to God for its truthfulness and surety. We choose to believe all God’s promises and we choose to ask the Holy Spirit each day to help us live joyfully in obedience to all God chooses for us. For Jesus’s sake. Amen.

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