



Joshua: Making the most of opportunities

Six Bible studies showing you how to use God's opportunities in your life.

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Bible Studies in this series

<p>Creation and Fall – 6 studies to look at the creation and fall of mankind. We will look at the perfection and plan of God’s creation and how man tarnished the creation with sin.</p>	<p>Jesus’ Miracles in John’s Gospel – 7 studies on the miracles of Jesus in the gospel of John. Each miracle has a meaning that tells us something important about Jesus’ person and ministry.</p>
<p>Noah: Man and Mission – 6 studies on the Flood. We will see the grace of God and the obedience and trust of Noah. God makes a new beginning in a fallen world.</p>	<p>Jesus’ parables in Luke – 6 studies on the parables of Jesus in Luke. We will look at the meaning behind some of these familiar parables and see patterns for our lives.</p>
<p>Storm Shelter Psalms – 6 studies on some of the psalms to turn to when life hits you hard. Wrestle with the psalmist as he learns to trust the Lord in difficult times.</p>	<p>Upper Room Conversations – 6 studies on the conversation that Jesus had with the disciples around the last supper table. Learn what was so important to Jesus that He just had to share it with the disciples.</p>
<p>Revival in Nehemiah – 6 studies on the second half of Nehemiah. The walls were rebuilt. Now it was time to rebuild a people who was down and distant from the Lord.</p>	<p>Galatians: Rules versus Grace – 6 studies with Paul in the heart of the gospel. In an age when people want to force us to follow their rules, Paul wants us to see the power of grace.</p>
<p>Daniel: Godly Living in a Pagan World – 6 studies to encourage us as we live in a world that has become harsh to God. It will make all the difference to keep our faith in tough times.</p>	<p>Paul’s first missionary journey – 6 studies on the conversion and first journey of Paul. See Paul as he grows and learn what the life of the Christian was meant to be.</p>
<p>Joshua: Making the most of opportunities – 6 studies following the first steps into the promised land which will show you how to use the opportunities that God gives you.</p>	<p>Sermon on the Mount – 6 studies on the three chapter sermon in Matthew to help you understand what it means to live in God’s Kingdom.</p>
<p>Power of Prayer – 6 studies on the power and help that we receive in prayer. Follow the saints in their prayers and learn from them how valuable prayer can be for you.</p>	

Introduction

God's opportunity was so close they could see it and smell it. God had brought them to the edge of the land promised to Abraham. They had been at the edge of the Promised Land 40 years ago, and fear had turned them back. Would this time be different? God would encourage Joshua and challenge him to believe. Courage would come to the people when they believed in what God could do enough to follow Him. God would use a pagan woman named Rahab to inspire them with the truth about their God. She saw the incredible power and majesty of the Lord in a way that the people did not. With faith, the priests would walk carrying God's ark into the swollen river, and the people would follow on dry land. The Lord would lead them around the fortified city of Jericho, and the walls would fall. Faith would allow them to see miracles. Opportunities would come from the Lord so that this land would become their home. They just needed to believe and follow the Lord so that they could overcome the nations by faith.

We often stare at opportunities and wonder what to do. We count the members of the congregation and our resources and often walk away in fear because we feel that it just isn't enough to get the job done. God encourages us to look to Him. We must believe in what God can do and not what we can't accomplish alone. God may send a small number of people to remind us of the truth about our God and His ability to handle the impossible. The "Rahabs" among us will challenge us to believe, as they do, that God can do everything. At that moment, we should follow the Lord as He leads us. He will bring us across troubled waters and conquer the problems that stand in our way. God wants His church to succeed as they do His ministry and will provide the guidance and power to do what others think can never happen. We will find strength as we recall what the Lord has done in the past and believe in what He can do in the future. God is our strength and will overcome all that stands in the way of ministry.

What opportunities do you or your church have to change the world? Look to the scripture as God commanded Joshua. Let the word of God give you a vision and the courage to follow wherever God leads you. When God commands you, put your foot in the rivers so that God may work a miracle and let you cross. Call upon the Lord with worship and prayer as you circle problems and wait for the Lord to bring them crashing down before you. In faith, we can go where the Lord leads and call upon Him to do things we could never do. We live by faith, recalling all the Lord has done for us and confident that our God has many more miracles in store for our ministry and life. Don't just stand there looking at missed opportunities because fear has taken over your heart. Boldly go where God is leading and watch the Lord work miracles so that the world may know that He is God and we are His people.

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How to use this Bible study

Each of the six chapters contains an introduction to help you get the big picture and is followed by thirteen questions to help you dig into the truth. The questions will help you understand what is going on and apply it to your own lives. The leader's guide provides answers for the questions that can be used in a Sunday Bible class or a small group. In a small group setting, you may find it helpful to copy the four-page leader's guide for each person. There are also student guides provided in the back of the book. In a large setting, it may be easier to copy those guides so that each of the members of the class has a student guide for personal use. Notice that there are also three questions at the end of each lesson that can either be discussed as you meet together or assigned for people to think about in the coming week.

My prayer is that you and the members of your group or class can grow through these studies. The answers in the leader's guide may challenge you to find deeper meaning and application for your lives. Life as a Christian can be difficult. It becomes even more difficult as we try to actively serve our Lord in ministry. The lessons that Jesus gave to help His disciples as they began the ministry of the new church are still important for us today. They can provide strength and help with our fears. As you study, realize that many of the questions have no single answer but are meant to help people find God's help in your trials. If you need to take more than one week per lesson, do so and enjoy the discussion and the learning.

Bibliography

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May the Lord bless you as you learn and grow in His grace.

Joshua 1. Courage to lead

Joshua 1:1-18

Big idea: Courage comes when you believe in what God can do.

The opportunity lies right before them. Across the Jordan River was the land that the Lord had promised Abraham and Moses. What the Jews needed was a leader who would help them fulfill what God had promised. Joshua has been preparing for this day for forty years, but God still has to give him a pep talk. A half-million people were looking to him for direction after wandering for 40 years. He has to go forward trusting God and leading the people to trust God when their parents failed and died in the desert. He needed to get this right and take advantage of the opportunity. God was ready to help. The first step toward seizing any opportunity is to recognize that the Lord is the source of our strength and power. If we have faith in God, we will have the courage to do what seems impossible. Our faith will impact others and give them courage. The nation was to believe in the Lord so that they could accomplish the promise that God had made to Abraham of Palestine, being theirs. Faith is necessary for the promise to be recovered for another generation.

Opportunities are placed before us by the Lord daily. The challenge is to be ready for them and willing to act. Often we feel overwhelmed by the task that is staring us in the face. We need to hear the promises that God makes to us in scripture and believe that they are true. We need to trust the Lord and rely on His strength, not our own. Such courage comes from being in God's word regularly. Only those who have an intimate relationship with the Lord will know what God has done so that they can trust Him for even greater things in the future. A church with small Bible class attendance will do only small things. They wander like the people of Israel in the desert because they never grasp what God can do. Opportunities come when we are courageous and encourage others to be courageous as well. God is ready to act and calls us to follow Him into the Promised Land of ministry, where we can be part of the miracles He does in the lives of others.

Ministry requires us to step up. Our temptation is to wait for God to call someone else to lead, but God has called and equipped us. We have to believe that God will do through us what He has asked of us. We need to be courageous because we have learned of God's marvelous deeds and character through His word. You can't believe or trust in God if you don't know Him. Only those who have an intimate knowledge of God will do great things. When you see what God is calling you to do, you need to encourage others as God has encouraged you. Leaders do not work in a vacuum; God uses them to prepare others for the opportunity as God has prepared them. God has lifted you so that you can lift them and let them succeed in their ministries. Finally, you build a team. There are a few times when God calls us to work alone. He has gifted others with gifts you don't have and that you need to take advantage of the prospects before your church or small group. God doesn't give us opportunities until we are capable of success. We need to trust Him and know that He has given us what we need to accomplish the tasks that He has given us.

1. Who is a leader you have admired in life or American history? What qualities do you see in them that you wish you had?

I have always been partial to Abraham Lincoln. He rose from obscurity with an alcoholic father to become a self-taught lawyer and president. He had values and a well-documented sense of humor. He grieved for the soldiers who were lost in the war and for the blacks enslaved against their will. He formed a cabinet out of his adversaries and was a great father to his children. I have been to his birthplace, his home in Springfield, and his grave, and I always walk away with a greater appreciation of the man. Let the group talk about who they admire in life and why the person stands out.

Read Joshua 1:1-18

2. Verse 2-3. What task is the Lord giving Joshua? What opportunity is he to grasp with God's help?

Joshua is faced with a formidable task. He has to lead the people across the Jordan River and take the land that the Lord has been promising to His people since the days of Abraham. It was a vast area from modern-day Syria down to the desert bordering Egypt and from the Mediterranean to the arid land of the East. He would lead the people into the land, defeat the enemy, and organize a nation of tribes as Moses had planned. There was a catch. They would only get what they put their feet on. They must go and have the faith to claim the land in the name of the Lord. It was a bold plan, but they would need to fight for the land and not be satisfied with a little portion. God had dreamed big, and they were to dream as big as their Lord if they were to become the nation that He envisioned.

3. Verse 2. When God called Joshua to succeed Moses, why was it necessary to be himself and not a second Moses? How has God specifically created you for the opportunities ahead?

Notice that God didn't ask Joshua to be another Moses. God had trained Joshua to be the general and leader in his own right. He had led the armies of Israel against the enemies of the nation on the way to the Promised Land. Joshua had been Moses' right-hand man for decades, so he had learned how to lead and was already one that the people listened to. He would also have been one of the oldest men in the camp. Only Caleb and Joshua had escaped death like the others of their generation who had died for their rejection of God 40 years before this date. All of us have unique gifts and need to use those gifts instead of trying to be just like someone else. Moses had the talent to lead the people out of Egypt. Joshua was given gifts to lead the people into Palestine. Our skills are specifically provided for the task God wants us to serve.

4. Verse 4-5. What promises does God make to Joshua and the people? How have God's past actions shown them that God can accomplish what He proposes?

God makes promises of victory over the enemy and land that the people will have. The biggest promise of them all to me is the promise to be with Joshua like He has been with Moses. Many in the camp must have seen God as the God of Moses since Moses talked with God on the mountain and the camp and even struck down those who opposed Moses as he led. God would continue to be with Joshua and do miracles (like the conquest of Jericho) by the hand of Joshua, just as He had done for Moses. Notice that God doesn't tell Joshua what miracles are but gives him a promise that will give him courage when things get rough. The task was overwhelming, but God would be with them through it all.

5. Verse 5. Think about the promises of God in the Bible. Which promises do you want to claim as you look at the opportunities God has given you?

There are promises about God's goodness to us (Psalm 145:9, James 1:17), His willingness to be with us (Isa: 43:2, Psalm 23:4), His provision (Prov. 3:5-6, Matt. 6:31-33), and His desire to answer our prayers (Luke 11:9-13, James 1:5) among many others. The list of God's promises is genuinely remarkable. Instead of praying and hoping that God will answer, we need to pray some of the promises because we know that God has promised to do those things in our lives. Each of us can carry a list of God's promises in our Bibles and turn to it so that we have the confidence that Joshua must have had when God made the promises of this text to Him. God wants His people to succeed and has offered to help us to do the ministry that He asks us to do.

6. Verse 6. What encouragement does God give to His servant? Why is this necessary if Joshua is to be successful in his task?

Before you can work miracles in God's name, you must believe and follow the Lord. Joshua's faith would either lift the people or bring them down. He was to be courageous so that they would have the faith to follow God and claim His promises of the new land and new life. The words stress two things. First, confidence was not to be in himself. The Lord is the source of our strength and power. As we believe in the Lord, we will have the courage to do the great things He calls us to do. It is so important that we lean on God that the Lord told Joshua to be strong and courageous three times in this passage. Second, if he trusted the Lord, others would follow. Joshua was to depend on the Lord so that he could win battle after battle. If he forgot the Lord and depended on himself, things would get ugly.

7. Verse 6. What is the source of courage that God wants us to have? Why must we look at God's strength and not our own?

Our source of courage must be based on the qualities and character of God. Joshua could not defeat the well-defended cities and strong armies of the Canaanites. God could do that easily. Churches make plans and go forward in ministry boldly, but if they do so without depending on the Lord, they will fail. The best strategies of man can only succeed if they are baptized with a lot of prayer and faith in the Lord. We look at God and not at ourselves. Self-confidence ruins us, for we depend on our feeble abilities rather than the wisdom and power of God. Our responsibility is not to plan enough to succeed but to listen to the Lord and go where He wants us to minister, trusting that He will bring success even if the odds seem great. The call to courage was one shared by Moses to Joshua (Deut. 31:6), by Joshua to the people (Josh 10:25), and by David to Solomon (1 Chron. 22:13).

8. Verse 8. What is God's command to Joshua? What will the study of the Bible accomplish?

The command is to study the book of the law. Moses had undoubtedly written down the words of the first five books of the Bible (Gen. to Deut.), and Joshua was to fill his life with the words of God in those pages. He had to be in the Bible so that he would know what God wanted and how God wanted it done. He and the people had to be in the word so that they might learn the nature of God and ponder about all the ways that God had been with them from the beginning. The Bible is not a book to put up on the shelf. It is a book to read so much that you memorize it and put it in your heart. Victory would come to the people if they followed God's command and lived Godly lives. Think about the loss that came when Achan disobeyed the Lord (Joshua 7), and you get a sense of why obedience was so important. The Israelites were to become God's people so that they might follow His ways and succeed.

9. Why is Bible study so essential before a congregation and its leaders can use the opportunities God has given them?

The words given to Joshua still apply today. The congregation that is in the word will have success with the opportunities that lie ahead. The assembly that tries to do that with human plans and resources will fail miserably. Several reasons exist for this. First, we must be in the word so that we do what God is calling us to do. We often try to do good things that are not God's will or not the best things for us and have mediocre results. Second, we need to be in the word so that we do our ministry with Godly character and values. Who would expect greedy or angry people to succeed in ministry for the Lord? Third, we also need to do things by God's power since we are fighting Satan as we try to take the world for the Lord. Satan will defeat us, but he is no match for the Lord's power and wisdom. The Bible is the place to start for ministry. We will accomplish little if we do not do His will in His way.

10. Verse 11. Having received God's encouragement, what is vital to the nation's success? Why must He encourage others?

Having received encouragement from the Lord, Joshua now encourages and calls the people to believe as well. Forty years before this, Joshua and Caleb called the people to believe that the Lord would conquer the land. Now he spoke again, urging them to believe in the Lord. His words were ones of encouragement

and faith. He wanted this generation to believe and conquer the land. He spoke to the leaders, holding them accountable so that they would then hold the people responsible. Entry into the Promised Land was a task that belonged to all of them. They needed to get their supplies ready, believing that the Lord would help them cross the swollen river and defeat the people of the land.

11. Who do you need to encourage or mentor if your congregation or group is going to be ready for the challenges and ministry ahead?

You can't do it alone. When you feel the Lord calling you to a ministry, you need to call others to join you in that trek. Gather others in the word. Create a fellowship group or a committee. Hearts must be ready to grow and to act. Gather the dreams and submit them to the Lord in prayer. You may need to start doing little things or things that will prepare you and others for the great things that the Lord has for your future. Others offer different gifts that may be necessary for the task. Others have resources, and a group of people will keep up each other's spirits during times when the mission gets tough. Let the group think of something they want to do in ministry and start praying about who they need to ask to share the journey with them. A group can do what a single person can never do by themselves.

12. Verse 16-17. How do the people respond to Joshua's message? How do they encourage Joshua in return?

To their credit, the people pledge to follow Joshua. Joshua knew that the task would not be easy, but having the support of others was a sign that the Lord was with him and had moved the hearts of all the people. The officers put aside any hidden agendas or pride. They pledged to obey his commands and go wherever God, through Joshua, would send them. Their words showed that they knew that they would defeat the enemy and were ready to follow God's plan. As Joshua encouraged them, their words must have encouraged him in return. The first step toward seizing any opportunity is to let God enable us and then go and inspire others. Hesitant and fearful people get nowhere. Together they would do the Lord's will and accomplish great things.

13. As you look at this chapter and the last paragraph of the introduction above, what steps are needed to become a leader? Why is each step important to your success?

Ministry requires faith so that we dare to do God's will. A leader needs to step up rather than wait for others to come forward. They are people in the word of God who have learned of God's marvelous deeds and qualities so that they trust his power and wisdom and are ready to follow God. They know God intimately and are willing to show others what God has done and is doing so that they follow the Lord as well. Finally, a leader gathers around them others who can join in the task. God does not call us to do this ministry alone. It belongs to us all, and we will get people in the world and into the task so that God's will may be done.

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1. How do you think Joshua felt when he realized God was calling him to lead the nation? How have you felt when asked to do a big task at church or in life?

Deep 2. What stories in the Bible or your life remind you of God's character or faithfulness and encourage you to lead others in ministry?

Deep 3. What task do you feel called to do in ministry, and who do you want to partner with you in that effort?

Joshua 2. The Power of One Faith

Josh 2:1-24

Big idea: Never underestimate what God can do through one person.

The story of Rahab is the story of how one person's faith changed everything. She chose to follow the true God and leave the gods of Jericho behind. On that day, she became an Israelite and was no longer a Canaanite. She did so because she saw what others had missed. Even most Israelites didn't understand God's miracles in the desert or the victories over mighty nations like Egypt and East Jordan. She was drawn to this God who could not be defeated and could take care of His people in the desert. Her faith would inspire others. First, the spies drew courage from her, and later the whole nation of Israel would do so. While others in Jericho were afraid of the Israelites and their God, she saw His mercy and kindness and asked for God's blessing on her family and herself. She believed that the Lord would accept them into His people. God rewards her, and she becomes an ancestor of Jesus. Her faith gave people the courage to do the miracles of God.

Too often, we feel that our life is too small to accomplish anything significant for God. Rahab helps us to see how our lives can change everything as well. It all begins with faith. The faithful will take risks because they believe in what God can do. They will speak to others about their faith and take on the challenging tasks in ministry. They do things by God's strength and not their own. They trust that God will provide for His church and stand by His people. They long to be part of God's plan and not just sit on the sidelines. They know that God can change lives by the simple things they do in God's name. Such faith inspires others. They see what this person does and want to join in on what God is doing through them. Their faith grows as they participate in the work and miracles that God is doing through those who believe. Others even gain a heart for those around them. Faith has a purpose, and that purpose is to help others grow in their relationship with the Lord so they can have His blessings. It doesn't take an army to do great things for the Lord. It often takes only one person with a strong faith who is willing to be used by God and attracts others to work with them.

She was a harlot from a pagan culture whose faith inspired everyone around her. Her faith makes a difference in creating confidence for the spies and the nation because she is open to the miracles of God. We need to remember that no person is too small or has too shady a past for them to be used by God. Faith overcomes our shortcomings, for it relies on the power of God and not our abilities or merit. Such faith will transform your life and the lives of those around you. You will save others by your witness and let the Lord work miracles through your ministry. One person can do enormous things if they work and live by faith. They will take risks and boldly go forward because they trust in the Lord. They will encourage others, and soon a small army is working miracles in ministry because they believe in the power of their God. Faith gives God the chance to do miracles through you and me. Faith can change our whole world.

1. What dangers do you think third-world people have just because they are Christian?

I feel blessed that I can talk about my faith with anyone or put a manger scene on my front lawn without being harmed in any way. People may not like what I say, but I am allowed to say it. Not so in the rest of the world. According to Christianity Today, China alone closed 5576 churches in 2020 and jailed 1147 Christians for their faith. Open Door claims that 1350 people were martyred for their faith in 2020 in Nigeria alone. Being a Christian is dangerous in parts of the world. It puts us to shame when we worry about the persecution that keeps Christians silent in our nation. (Taken from an article at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/january/top-christian-persecution-open-doors-2020-world-watch-list.html>.)

Read Josh 2:1-24

2. Verse 1 What is the spies' mission, and why do they stay with Rahab when they visit the city?

Forty years earlier, Moses had sent twelve spies into Canaan with God's permission (Numbers 13), and only two had returned with an encouraging report. Joshua now sends two spies to get information specifically about Jericho. It was not an act of unbelief since God had promised victory, and Joshua had believed it (1:11). It was just the leader of God's people doing reconnaissance. Rahab was a harlot whose home was probably an inn or tavern. Some who stayed there had sexual encounters. Others just needed a place to stay. It would have been a public place that would have been a great place to gather information. Jewish tradition (which is just a guess) says that the two spies were Caleb and the High Priest Eliezer. If so, Joshua wanted spies who would give a good report showing their trust in God.

3. Verses 3-4 What is the king's command, and what is Rahab's response? How is her response an act of faith?

The city discovers the mission of the two spies. The king even believes that he knows where they are and calls Rahab to hand them over. Her decision to lie about the location of the spies is never justified by scripture but simply reported. It shows her faith in God's power and mercy. She knows that if the king discovers the men, she will be punished. She chooses to trust the true God and leave the gods of Jericho behind. In that instant, she becomes an Israelite and not a Canaanite. She believes in the spy's mission from the Lord and casts her lot in with God and His people. She believes that those who oppose God do so in vain. It gave her the courage to put her life on the line and take the bold stand that she does.

4. Verse 4. In what way does faith allow us to take risks in ministry? What makes those risks worthwhile?

Faith is the key to powerful ministry. Only those who believe that nothing is impossible for God will take risks as they witness to others and do ministry in God's name. In America, it could mean having the courage to speak to your family even if you know it is risky. In places in the world, worshipping God or sharing your faith could alienate you from your family, cost you your job, or even end you in prison or death. We take those risks because we want to be close to the Lord. Like the saints to whom John wrote the book of Revelation, we are people who know what side will win in the end. We want to be part of God's plans and kingdom and will gladly face discomfort or worse rather than lose our relationship with the Lord. Faith brings confidence in God and a desire never to depart from Him.

5. Verse 9. What has faith allowed Rahab to see that the others miss? How has this knowledge given her courage?

Rahab shows more confidence than the ten spies did forty years before. She emphatically says, "I know that the Lord has given you the land" (Joshua 2:9). Such faith saw what others missed. She had heard how God parted the Red Sea and defeated the Egyptians and the kings east of the Jordan. If God could do those things, what were the defenses of Jericho? The report of God's power had preceded the Israelites, causing the people of Jericho great fear and anguish. It had drawn Rahab to God and made her long to have this God as her own. In Jericho, she was an outcast. As one of God's people, she would find forgiveness and a new life. While the Israelites had their doubts, Rahab had only faith and hope in God based on all He had already done.

6. Verse 9. Why is faith necessary to follow the Lord? What does faith allow us to see?

Like the Israelites, we believe, but we have fears and doubts. We will follow, but we will not take the lead. It is only someone who has the faith of Joshua or Rahab that takes charge. They believe in God's power and plan with all their heart. They don't take the things that God has done for granted. They have heard and experienced God's mighty work in the lives of people they know and their community. They

move forward because they are sure that God will provide for and protect His people. These are the people that God can use to do miracles. They will move before all the resources are in place or before others are on board with the ministry. They have a desire for the Lord to make an impact on their community and their family. No matter how insignificant they feel, they believe that God can do miracles through them. Without such faith, you sit back and wait for God to do miracles before you are willing to act.

7. Verse 11 What does Rahab confess about the God of Israel? How does this set her apart from the others in Jericho?

She acknowledges that Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, is the God in heaven and over all the earth. That is a deep confession for a pagan woman in a pagan city. She believes in a personal God, for He is "your God" and a God who is greater than all. She has never seen the glory of God as the Israelites or witnessed the miracles firsthand, but she confesses that Yahweh is greater than all the gods of the Canaanite people. He is not limited to one location or land. He is God of all, and she was saying that she wanted Him to be her God. Others in Jericho would have seen the Israelite God as someone to be feared and who would destroy them. She saw God's acts as His kindness to His people. If the spies had doubts about God at this point, her confession must have put them to an end. If a pagan harlot could believe in God like that, surely God was amazing.

8. Verse 11. How can the strong faith of one person inspire others? How does it move others to act for the Lord?

Most of us have been inspired by the words or actions of someone else. We are amazed at a great sermon or the witness of one of the leaders of our congregation. We are surprised when someone makes great sacrifices to serve others or help them in their need. Such faith inspires others to serve and work toward the dream with them. Such people believe in what God is doing so much that it is contagious, and others begin to join in. We see them throw themselves into the challenges and start believing the Lord will do miracles with them. However, what is missing is that we should be willing to do ministry like that and not just wait for others to join in the ministry with us. Often, we have to start small, but we find something that we believe the Lord wants and has gifted us to accomplish. We begin by ourselves, and as the ministry has some success, we start asking others to join us in what we are doing. Soon, the ministry grew, and what was a simple act of faith is now helping many others know the Lord.

9. Verse 12. Who is Rahab concerned about when the destruction comes? What is she asking for beyond safety?

Rahab wants her family to belong to the Lord. She wants assurances from the two spies that her family will be safe when God takes the city. She desires that all of them become part of the family of God. Her wish is not just that they be safe through the conquest of Jericho but that they become part of the Israelite people. She will gather them all together in one place so that she might share her faith in the Lord. They would watch together the destruction of their city, sure that the Lord would protect them because of their hope in God. Her faith would give them confidence even as the walls of Jericho seemed to be falling around them. The spies pledge their lives to protect her when the Israelites take the city.

10. How has your faith changed your family? Why is faith the greatest gift we can give to those we love?

Our faith changes the people around us, and that starts with those nearest to us. Many a parent or grandparent is the reason that someone has such a strong faith in the Lord. As a child, this person saw and was influenced by the faith of someone dear to them. It is only natural to show concern for our family and want them to belong to the Lord as we do. How horrible it would be if we brought hundreds of people to faith and not one of our children was with us in heaven. The greatest gift we can give to those we love is

to teach them about Jesus and to help them learn to trust in Him every day of their lives. God is concerned about our loved ones and will help us in our witness to them. We can tell our children about Jesus' love for them and us. We can bring the family to worship with us and help them find their ministries to bring them great joy. Christian children, siblings, and grandchildren are a blessing to us since God can use them to minister to us in our needs. Deeply desire God's mercy for those you love, and it will be the gift that gives great rewards to you as well.

11. Verse 24. How does Rahab's faith impact the nation of Israel? What insight does she give to them about the future?

You have to believe that one of the reasons that God sent the spies to Rahab was so that her witness could encourage the lowliest of the Israelite people. As we will see, the surveillance didn't help with the military strategy. God had a unique plan for the destruction of the city. It did, however, encourage the faith of the spies and the people of God. The people went into battle with confidence that they may not have had before. The words of Rahab were God's message to His people, highlighting the power and mercy of God and the fear and trembling of the people in Jericho. She knows that God will take the seemingly impenetrable city. Whatever plan God has will be successful. She has put her life on it, and her report encourages others to trust in the Lord as well. It bodes well for her assimilation into the people of God.

12. How does one faithful person change the climate of a whole group of people so that they can do great things?

Many of us have been at church meetings or ministries where one person's faith seems to move the whole group. It may be someone who stands up and says that God can do this great thing or takes on a task, and others seem to follow. We may think that we are too small or unimportant to make such a difference, but sometimes quiet and unassuming people make the biggest difference. They have families that become the pillars of the church and help the congregation or ministry for decades to come. Like Rahab, we start with the belief that nothing is impossible with God. We are people in the word and prayer so that when we speak, people know that God is speaking through us. We become people with a character that people trust and a vision that people begin to see. That one person changes the climate of the church for decades as they have spiritual sons and daughters who carry on the ministry long after the person is gone. Our impact can be far more significant than we would ever believe if we trust the Lord and encourage others to come with us on the journey.

13. What does this passage teach us about the power of one faithful person? What would it take you to be such a person?

You might expect Joshua to make an impact through his faith. He was the right-hand man of Moses for forty years. However, one would probably never expect Rahab, the pagan prostitute, to make such an impact. The truth is that God can use all kinds of people. No person is too small or has too shady a past for God to use them. Faith overcomes our shortcomings so that miracles can happen as we act in faith. Rahab's faith has a significant impact on the history of God's people. She and Sarah, the wife of Abraham, are the only two women mentioned in Hebrews 11. She is also the unspoken figure in the book of Ruth. Her son, Boaz, shows faith and kindness in how he treats Ruth, the foreigner who becomes part of God's family. Start small and trust the Lord to guide you and bless you all the way. You may change your life and the lives of many spiritual children for years to come.

For now or later - taking the next step.

Deep 1 What is one place where you feel you need to stand for your beliefs no matter the consequences?

Deep 2 What holds you back from trusting the Lord and taking a leap of faith?

Deep 3 What would you like your family to learn about God from your faith and actions?

Joshua 3. God leads the way

Josh 3:1-17

Big idea: Faith goes forward to where God is working.

They must have wondered how they would cross the river. Two spies could swim their way across or travel in a small boat. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children with all their worldly possessions would never make it across the swollen river. It was time for the people of Israel to have faith. God would lead them and open the way to the land that He promised. He would go first, but they would need to follow. The priests would have to step into the flooded river before the waters would recede. The people would have to follow, or they would lose everything as their parents had forty years before. God was teaching them to trust Him and learn to follow Him wherever he led them. They would take the Promised Land by faith, obeying God as they went into battle and took the land inch by inch. That would never happen without faith. Here at the river, they would learn to trust God and see what the Almighty could do. Only then would they be ready to take Palestine as their own.

It would be easier if God did miracles first and proved Himself to us each time before we had to obey. God does miracles, but we often have to remember what He has done in the past so that we have faith and see miracles in the present. Like the Israelites, we need to remember that the Lord is at our side. We need to spend time praying and studying the Word to find what God is calling us to do. Too often, we have meetings and plans first and expect God to bless our plans. God must determine the course, for He alone has the power and wisdom to make ministry happen. We must obey when God calls, trusting Him even before the miracles happen. Our leaders often go first, and the congregation or small group follows their lead. If we don't trust the Lord, we lose the blessings that God wants to give. If we obey the Lord, we grow in faith and are ready for even greater blessings in the future. Faith often moves forward in ministry one step at a time.

Too often, we think that faith is only about getting to heaven and avoiding hell. It is about life. The Promised Land is as much about this life as it is about the next. It is about having the faith to move forward in our relationship with the Lord and live in His blessings each day. Obedience is required for that to happen. We can't expect God to make everything easy so that we have the confidence to go forward in life and ministry. Often, we step out into challenging waters trusting the Lord will move the mountains for us. God wants to use every situation as a chance for us to grow in faith and build our relationship with Him. He wants us to move forward in life so that we create a life dependent on Him and beneficial to others. God saved us so that we might be people who live by faith. Churches and Christians that wait for God to make things easy will never accomplish much. God's people are to move forward boldly so that we show God's power to the world.

1. What is the biggest river that you have ever seen? (Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, other?) What would it take for a large number of people to cross the river without a bridge?

I live close to the Ohio River. Before the lock and dam system went in, there were times when it was possible to walk across the Ohio River in the winter. Many slaves walked to freedom from Kentucky to Ohio in that manner. Now, the locks keep the river full so barges can move coal, grain, and other products up and down the river. It would take a lot of boats to move the hundreds of thousands of Israelites across this body of water. When the river floods in the spring, it would be unsafe, even with boats, to move that number of people across. With your knowledge of big rivers, imagine trying to move the nation of Israel across safely.

Read Joshua 3:1-17

2. Verse 3. How did the people know when it was safe to cross the river?

The flooded Jordan River must have seemed like a barrier that couldn't be crossed. God would lead His people and open the way to the Promised Land. God would accomplish what was impossible for them. His strength and not their own would perform this beginning. Notice that the people would follow a thousand yards behind the ark. That ten-football field length would be a separation of respect and would also allow a large portion of the nation to see the moment when the priests stepped into the raging river and the water stopped. The people had followed the Lord's cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night through the desert. Now, they would follow the Lord's ark as they had before in the desert (Numbers 10:33). God will show them where and when to go.

3. Verse 3. Why must God lead in ministry? Why will we fail if we try to direct God?

Like the Israelites, we don't know where or when to go without the Lord leading us. God has to go first and show us the way. We can't tell Him what it means to be a Christian or define what ministry should do or look like. He has the knowledge and the power to accomplish the things we can never do by ourselves. If God doesn't go first or we don't seek His will in prayer, we will fail. Too often, we move ahead because we think we know what God wants to be done without ever asking Him for direction or following His lead. The church must show honor to God as the Israelites did. They must be looking for God to move forward and jump ahead at the opportunity to follow behind the Lord even if they are uncertain where exactly we are going. God will give direction and encourage His people. We need to keep our eyes on Him and be ready when He calls us to move forward.

4. Verse 5. Why did the people need to consecrate themselves before crossing the river?

It was a spiritual thing. This day was different from getting ready for a camping trip in which you ensure all the gear is packed and ready to go. It was like changing clothes and bathing for Sunday worship. The people were to prepare themselves so that their hearts were ready for the gift that the Lord would give them. It was a time to shake off any fears they had for the future and prepare themselves mentally to walk forward in faith for the spiritual battles ahead. Think of the preparation a bride makes on the day of her wedding or the preparation a knight would make to have an audience with the king. The people were to put aside all their doubts and focus on the Lord in anticipation of God keeping the promise that He had made to Abraham and Moses. How their hearts must have tingled. The day was almost here. Get ready to enter your new home with faith and confidence in God.

5. Verse 5. How do we prepare for ministry, and why is this so necessary?

Too often, the ministry is prepared with a meeting and a plan. In those moments, where is God? It would be better to get ready with an hour of prayer and Bible study before you begin to make any plans. Faith has to get ready for ministry. You seek out God's will and not your own. We struggle with that course of action because it takes time. Why is it that we will wait hours for the newest I-phone but won't wait for God to give instructions for ministry? If you are going to have God's blessings, you need to prepare yourself mentally by immersing yourself in His Word and by taking the time to ask what God wants you to do. God should not be asked to bless our plans. We need to seek His will and do it without question since He alone knows what is next. Honor God, and your ministry will succeed.

6. Verse 6. Who must be the first to trust God before the people will do so? What were the people to learn from this act of faith?

The leaders need to get their feet wet first. If the people were to learn to trust that the Lord would do the miracle He had proclaimed He would do, the priests had to go first. It would be their responsibility to step into the swollen river carrying the heavy and precious ark. They had to have faith before the Lord would hold back the river and let the people cross by on dry land. We don't know if the waters receded as soon as the first priest touched the water or if the priests waited a moment in the swollen river before the waters

receded. Either way, they had to obey so that the miracle could happen. Their faith would then inspire the people as they saw that God would do just as He said. It would also be an opportunity for God to show the Canaanites what was coming. Undoubtedly, the people of Jericho across the river were watching. They would see the waters recede as the priests stepped into the water. They would watch the impossible happen as hundreds of thousands of Israelites crossed on dry land. The river would offer them no security, and soon, even their walls would fall. The obedience of the leaders would allow God to show everyone what was coming.

7. Verse 6. Why must leaders show their faith before the congregation or group will follow?

Leaders still have to get their feet wet. In a church or small group, the leadership has to take the first steps in ministry. If they won't support a ministry with their time or resources, it usually doesn't happen. They have to step out in faith so that others will follow. For that reason, being a leader is not easy. It is a matter of faith and courage as they rely on the Lord to do what He has promised. It is also essential that the leaders of a church or small group are people in the world. The call of God for Joshua to be in the Word (Joshua 1:8) is the beginning of being a leader. In the text, Joshua heard and obeyed God's will and communicated it to the leaders who believed and led the people through the Jordan. If leaders have not taken the time to be in the Word, they will never have the faith to trust the Lord. They will move by their desires and not by faith.

8. Verse 7. How did God encourage Joshua, and why did God do it in front of the priests?

God speaks to Joshua, promising again to be with him as He had been with Moses. Joshua had seen the closeness that Moses had with God. The miracle of crossing the Jordan just as Joshua had said God had promised the people would be an opportunity for God to confirm that Joshua was His spokesperson and that the people should listen to Him. This exaltation was not just about encouraging Joshua. It was to help the people see that God was with Joshua. God would continue to speak through Joshua, and the people needed to obey those commands. His direction in battle and his words governing the people would all come from the Lord and needed to be heeded if the people were to have the blessings of the Promised Land that God had pledged. As they had followed Moses, they needed to follow Joshua.

9. Verse 9. How was the river crossing a sign from God and a test of the Israelites?

If God could tame a raging river, He could lead the people to conquer the scattered Canaanite tribes across the river. This crossing was to be the first miracle among many as God gave Israel the Promised Land. The fall of Jericho by marching around it instead of laying siege to its walls would be the second miracle showing God's incredible power and wisdom. It would also be a test. If the people did not follow, they would lose everything the Lord had in mind for them. They would be just like their parents, who died in the wilderness because they did not believe in the Lord. God had given them all the information that they needed. It was up to them to believe what the Lord would do. As they walked across the dry river bed, they would understand first-hand the power of God and desire that the Lord give them this land. Each step they took would be a chance to grow in faith so more and more miracles could happen.

10. Why is faith so necessary before God can bless us? How is each challenge an opportunity for us to grow?

When God's people don't trust Him, they get in the way of the blessings that the Lord wants to give. Forty years before, the generation that came out of Egypt lost faith in God and perished in the desert. Many churches lose blessings because they don't have the faith to step out when God calls them to do so. The blessings are not on this side of the Jordan. They are across the river, and you have to have the faith to take the first step before God will act. You can't expect God to serve you if you are not following Him. God often calls us to trust Him so that we grow in our faith. Each time we step forward and a miracle happens, it helps us to learn and grow in our faith. We see God's power and learn what God can do. You

are bolder to step forward the next time, and God can do even greater ministry through you. Being someone who waits for God to act first is not faith. It is testing God and making Him prove Himself before you will move an inch.

11. Verse 15. What act of faith is necessary before the miracle can begin in the water? Why must they obey before miracles can happen?

Obedience is required for the miracle to happen. When God opened the Red Sea, God called on Moses to stretch out his hand, and a strong wind blew the whole night and drove the sea back. The miracle happened, and then the people obeyed. Here the miracle comes after obedience. During the flood season, the Jordan can be almost a mile wide at places, and it took the feet of the priests on the river bed for the water to stop flowing. God may have been teaching His people a lesson. If you obey me, miracles will happen. If you rebel, miracles will never appear. It was a time for the people to grow in faith so that they would be ready to follow the Lord and take the land that He had promised. God's sequence here was to force the Israelites to act before the blessings came. It would be obedience that they would need if they were to win the battles ahead with the Canaanite people.

12. Why does God often make us take the first step before miracles and blessings can come?

It would be nice if the rivers of life were dry before we are called to take the first step. That would make faith easy. God's purpose is often as much to develop us as it is to accomplish some grand plan. Remember how your parent taught you how to mow the grass? It was a lesson in growing up as much as in handing off a task. The first couple of times you cut the grass, it would have been easier for Dad to mow it himself than watch you and teach you. Likewise, God uses ministry to develop His people. The kingdom of God is not for lazy people. It is for growing people. God doesn't just want us to get salvation by the skin of our teeth. He wants to help us grow in faith to become valuable to ourselves and others. Each time we or our church move forward in faith, confidence grows, and bigger tasks are possible. Each time we step forward, we learn and experience more about our God and grow in our relationship with Him.

13. What does this passage teach us about faith and ministry? Why is salvation just the beginning of our walk with God?

Life is about more than just salvation. It is about living as children of God. God could have just handed the people of Israel the Promised Land but then what? Instead, God worked to develop faith so that the people would live as His people in the land He gave them. He wanted them to cling to Him and not to be afraid of the dangers that would come as they made this land their home. For Christians today, salvation is just the beginning. Our ministry is a chance to get closer to the Lord and to learn to trust Him. He will take us step by step so that we learn to live as His people. Unbelief says let's go where it is safe. Faith says let's go forward and be part of where God is working so that we create a place to live and witness to others so that they can join us in the Kingdom of God. Faith is not just about heaven or hell. It is about life. God saved us so that we might be people who live by faith and can draw others to our God.

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1 How is ministry a series of faith-filled steps?

Deep 2 How important is obedience to the Lord in having a successful ministry?

Deep 3 What step is God calling you to take so that your ministry goes forward?

Joshua 4. Remember God's help

Josh 4:1-19

Big idea: Remembering God is the key to a better present and future.

Joshua 4 is a story about the first memorials that Joshua would set up in the land of Palestine. God's people often forget what God has done for them, so these memorials were to remind future generations what the Lord had accomplished here at the Jordan River. A memorial was set up at the camp of the Israelites after they crossed the river. They could touch the stones from the raging river and let the rocks remind them of their crossing to this new life. The days of wandering were over, and God had transformed His people and their future. They would have a home in Palestine that is their home to this day. The rocks also confirmed that Joshua was God's servant. The miracle happened just as he said it would. It also showed God's ability; they would learn to trust Him as they took this new land and made it their own. This memorial would mark for generations that their mighty God kept His promises and that the future was secure if they trusted Him.

Memorials cover our nation. Battlefields like Gettysburg and Vicksburg are filled with monuments to the bravery of winners and losers. Mount Rushmore honors four of the presidents who changed our country. We need memorials to remind us of great presidents, battles, and events that changed our world. Without them, we would forget the past. Churches put up walls of memories to remind them of times when the Lord worked miracles in their midst. Such stories and artifacts remind us of what God has done and will continue to do for His church if they look to Him for help. God wants us to see that the church's history is not filled with luck but with men and women who believed in their God so much that they were willing to take risks. They are not heroes but are simply people of faith. They trusted God and can teach us to trust the Lord as well. Memorials ultimately recognize what God has done in the past so that we will trust Him in the future.

Memorials are to encourage future generations (verses 21-22). The children would ask what these stones meant, and it was a time to teach them about the goodness of God. Only when the power of God stopped the water were these stones accessible. They were to be something they could touch and see to feel firsthand the power of a miracle. Visual symbols or pictures should fill our homes with reminders to help our children see the greatness of God. We want them to understand that God still works miracles for His people and will continue to be there throughout their lives. We also desire that memorials encourage the world around us. Canaanite spies in the hills saw the Jordan River stop so the people could cross. These stones served as a reminder for them that God was almighty and was to be respected. The cross on the church or the nativity scene on the lawn tells the story of God's love and encourages people to claim Him as their God. Remembering God is the key to a better present and future.

1. What is your strongest memory of your childhood?

Many people remember good times like a birthday party or a school dance. Others remember the funeral of a loved one or the tornado that ripped through their town. My memories are happy ones. I remember many camping trips I took with my parents and brothers as a kid. I enjoyed camping in the Rockies and swimming in the Great Lakes. The best part of it all was my close time with my family. I had the full attention of my parents, who didn't have to work for those two or three weeks, and I had the joy of working together as a family. As an adult, I can proudly say that my children had the same camping experience from Maine to Arizona. Be sure to share your experiences and why they are so special.

Read Josh 4:1-19

2. Verse 6. What did God command Joshua to do as they finished crossing the Jordan River? What was the value of this memorial?

God calls twelve men, one from each tribe, to gather a stone from the river's bottom. The nation would place this memorial at Gilgal, where they would camp for the night. The monument would be a place of tribute to the Lord. Joshua put these stones in an area that people would see for years. The nation would crown Saul as the first king of Israel there (1 Sam. 11:15). David would be welcomed back as King at Gilgal after the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam. 19). Finally, there would be a school of prophets at Gilgal in the days of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-2). Joshua 4:24 says that Joshua did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the Lord is powerful and so the people would never forget the Lord their God.

3. Verse 6. What Bible story would you like your children to remember? Why?

The church has put memorials up as a remembrance of what the Lord has done for years. In Palestine, you can visit the church of the Holy Sepulcher, which is reportedly the site of Mt. Calvary and the empty tomb in Jerusalem. You can visit the Sea of Galilee and see where Jesus is supposed to have taught the Sermon on the Mount. Churches put up cornerstones and plaques on the wall to remind them of the blessings of the Lord for the congregation. Discuss what you would like your children to remember from the Bible and how you might make a memorial in your home by putting up a picture or statue commemorating that story. Sadly, we often forget what God has done and soon stop thinking of Him when we struggle.

4. Verse 9. Why did Joshua put up a second memorial by the river? What did that memorial symbolize?

The Bible mentions the second set of stones in verse 9 as a memorial set either in the river or at its edge. These stones focused on the miracle itself. Like a signpost letting us know we have entered a new state, these stones would remind the people that they had entered the land that the Lord had promised them for generations. This location was where God had stopped the water and kept His promise to Abraham. It would be a place where generations of people could talk of the lengths the Lord was willing to go to bring His people home. It would give confidence to generations that their God would answer prayers and do miracles on their part. The first memorial at Gilgal showed that God was giving them a new home and a new beginning. The river memorial would testify to the power of the Lord for generations to come.

5. Verse 9. What memorials do you have at your church? What do they symbolize to you?

The church I serve has a cornerstone by the front door. It reminds people of the church's roots in Covington, 8 miles away, the founding in the Erlanger location, and the expansion of the current building. Each is a significant time of grace for the church. Other churches might have a decorative cross placed at a specific time or a hall of pictures of former pastors. Those remind members and future generations of all the Lord has done for the church. Those memorials must point us to the Lord. Sadly, they may sit there for years, with few knowing what they mean. Talk about the monuments at your church and how you can highlight their meaning to others.

6. Verse 14. What did the miracle at the crossing show the people about Joshua? Why was that important to their future?

The miracle confirmed Joshua as the new leader of the people. He had conveyed God's instructions, and things had happened just as he said they would. He had overseen a miracle that reminded them of the parting of the Red Sea by Moses. If there was anyone who questioned the leadership of Joshua, this miracle showed that they needed to follow him, for He spoke for God just like Moses did. Here was the man God had chosen to lead them into the Promised Land. If they wanted to follow the Lord, they needed to follow Joshua. God had promised He would exalt Joshua before the people (Joshua 3:7), and the miracle at the Jordan had done just that.

7. Verse 14. Why is it necessary for the church to honor its leaders? Why is it important to respect our church leaders?

While one should never worship the church's leaders, we all must respect them. God has placed them in the positions that they have in the church. As they speak from the scripture, they speak for Him. Too often, others in the church question the leaders and don't listen to what they say. It causes divisions in the church and keeps it from the Lord's ministry for His people. Even if a leader is not doing what you would do in a specific situation, you need to show them respect and humbly share your ideas, not expect leaders to do your bidding. Encourage your leaders and support them so they can give their best in words and actions. Please don't put them in a corner where they sink to a lower level when they feel oppressed.

8. Verse 18. What did the miracles teach the people about God? How was faith in God necessary for the days to come?

For anyone who still had doubts about the ability of God to take a ragtag nation and conquer the land of Palestine, the miracle at the Jordan showed them the power of God. The water not only stopped when the priests stepped into the water with the ark, but the water also resumed as soon as the ark was on dry land. There was no doubt that God had stopped the water. The people needed to understand the miracle to trust the Lord as He commanded them to take great cities like Jericho or Bethel. At the river, they could see what the Lord could do. Armies would be no match for a God who could stop a flooded river. The miracle gave the people confidence that God would keep His promises.

9. How does God build faith in Himself in the church? What are the benefits of seeing God's hands in the miracles around us?

If God's people are looking, they can see the hand of God at work in their midst. We are good about asking God for help in prayer. However, I think we would be wise to spend more time thanking God and celebrating what He has done. God leaves footprints for those looking so that they see His miracles and ask for more. Little by little, their faith is built as they see God doing little things and begin to ask for greater and greater blessings in their life and ministry. God wants us to know that we were not just lucky that something worked out. He wants us to look beyond what everyone else will call a coincidence so that we see His love and power at work for us. The more we see His miracles, the more we will come to Him for help in the future and be blessed by His power and care.

10. Verse 21. How were the stones a teaching tool for the next generation? Why would that be so important?

The generation who witnessed the miracle at the Jordan would remember the day for a long time. Their children and grandchildren would need something to remind them of what the Lord did. It is like visiting battlefields like Gettysburg or Vicksburg to get a feel for the sacrifices people made for us or visiting Kitty Hawk in North Carolina to understand the risks of those first flights. The visual memorials at the camp and the river would remind generations of what the Lord did for them. It would be easy to take for granted the Promised Land. Here they could touch the stones once at the bottom of the river. They could ponder the wonder of the miracle as they looked at the flooded Jordan. The memorials would remind them of the lengths the Lord was willing to go to so they could have what He had promised.

11. Why is God so concerned about the next generation of Jews and Christians?

Every church is just one generation away from extinction. You can have a church full of active fifty-year-old members, but the church may not exist in thirty years if there are no children. The church is to be a place where the faith is passed from one generation to another. Joshua must have sensed that the generation that conquered Palestine had not passed the faith on, for his last words in this book (Joshua 24) focus on the need for the people to remain faithful to the Lord. Sadly, the book of Judges shows the people served God through the lifetime of Joshua, but the next generation would forget the Lord (Judges

2:10). It is easy to believe in the Lord when times are exciting but to start forgetting God as life gets busy with other things. Pictures and symbols should fill our homes, reminding children constantly of the Lord. All too often, houses don't even have a cross hanging on the wall, and parents let their children choose whether to go to church. As a result, they lose the next generation who doesn't know or remember what the Lord has done.

12. Verse 24. What would these memorials tell the world about the true God?

The two memorials were to remind the people of Israel and the other nations of the miracles that God worked during the life of Joshua. This miracle was a new beginning for the people of God. They were a nation that Egypt had enslaved, and God had freed them and given them a home. As they touched the stones, they could relive the miracle and see how God had power over nature. They could see how dramatically God took care of His people. They could see how powerful God was. It would be something that would remind several generations as they passed down the story from one generation to the next. The story would give them confidence that God would continue to care for them and that nothing would be too hard for God in the days ahead.

13. What event do you want your friends and children to remember so they see that God has been with you?

Most Christians have had life-changing events in their lives, showing that the Lord was with them. It may have been a surgery that went well or the start of a new job in a new city. Think about what has been life-changing for you. Then, how can you share that with your children or your friends? Is there a memorial you can build in your home that allows you to share that story every time someone sees it and asks why the object is so memorable? Life goes on, and it is good for us to stop and recall the moments that the Lord has been with us. It gives us the courage to ask for help from God in the times ahead and creates memories that remind us to be thankful to our God for all He does.

For now or later - taking the next step.

Deep 1 What would have stuck with you if you had crossed with the Jews? Would it have been the crunch of the stones on the dry riverbed? Is it the sight of water stopping when the ark entered the river, or is it something else?

Deep 2 What miracle have you seen that you will never forget? How has it changed your life?

Deep 3 What picture, statute, or other reminders would you like to place in your home to remind you of God's greatness?

Joshua 5. Do it God's Way

Josh 6:1-19

Big idea: God's people overcome the world by faith

As the Israelites gazed at the city of Jericho, conquering the city must have seemed impossible. The city had two walls and strong defenses behind them. Any attack on the town would be a suicide mission. God would do the impossible, but He would do it in a way that built faith as it tore down walls. God had prepared the city for conquest. The inhabitants were in a panic, having heard how God had stopped the Jordan River and the people walked on dry land. The Israelites were primed for a lesson. The battle would be fought on God's terms so that the people could see the full power of what their God could do. Faith would grow as the people did what seemed ludicrous because God said to do so. Their obedience would open up the door for victory. In the end, they learned to trust God and believed that the rest of the battles would be won by God as well. Faith would triumph, and a miracle would unfold before their eyes.

There are days when we wonder if the church will survive. The giants we face seem as impossible to conquer as the city of Jericho. Our challenge, like many in Israel, is one of faith. We are often more afraid of the culture than our culture is of the church. God is still working behind the scenes so that we might succeed with the gospel, but we are shaking in our boots. We must remember that this is God's battle for the hearts and souls of the people around us. If we are going to battle with the enemy as we try and bring friends and relatives the gospel, we need to begin with prayer. We have to get instructions from God before we act. Miracles will happen, but they will only happen if we follow God's plans for us and our ministry. We also have to believe. God's victories will not come because of our cunning or abilities. The triumph comes because we follow God and do as He calls us to do. We look back and see all the ways that God has done miracles for us and the church in the past so that we dare to move forward and see miracles today. God's people overcome the world by walking in faith.

It is all about faith. God purposely gave the city of Jericho into the hands of Israel so that both Israel and the Canaanites knew that it was God who had brought the victory. It gave the Israelites the faith to go further and take the rest of Palestine. We have to believe that God is working miracles today among us. We can be afraid of the tasks God gives us to do, like sharing our faith with a friend or taking on a mission with finances or children at our church, or we can pray and ask the Lord to lead us. He may take us in a direction we don't expect, but those who follow the Lord will see Him use His power to conquer the world with the gospel. We know that God has been working behind the scenes. We must also believe that God will work through us so that the world sees how great our God is. Faith that follows the Lord will overcome the world.

1. What is the most intimidating thing you have ever been asked to do? What made it so hard for you to do?

When the church organist was on vacation, I was asked to play for the church service at college. I was a music major, but my instrument was voice and not piano. I could do a little piano, but I froze during the service in front of all the people worshipping there. One of my friends had to bail me out and do the rest of the service. I could easily have sung a dozen solos for music, but I felt out of place at the keyboard. Let the group discuss times when they were overwhelmed and why they felt that way. Let them also share if they ever felt comfortable with the task. (I have played several times for church services in the years since.)

Read Josh 6:1-19

2. Verse 1. Describe the state of affairs in Jericho. How are the people feeling? How has the Lord prepared the Israelites for this day?

The people of Jericho must have been in a panic. Rahab had said that "all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you" (Josh 2:9). The people had heard of God's triumph over Egypt and the kings on the east side of the Jordan. Surely, they had spies who had seen the nation of Israel cross the Jordan on dry ground. God was doing what Israel could not. He was the inside man working behind the walls to whip up doubt and fear among the people of Jericho. At the same time, he was encouraging Joshua and the people with the words of Rahab to the spies and the mighty miracle at the Jordan that harked back to the crossing of the Red Sea forty years before. The city was shut up, hoping that they would be spared. The Israelites who saw an "impenetrable" city were being prepared to see what their God could do.

3. Verse 1. How do you feel when looking at a task that will take a miracle to overcome? What do you need if you are going to feel comfortable with your service for the Lord?

Sadly, it often seems like the church comes to crossroads in ministry and trembles in fear. God is still working behind the scenes preparing the neighbor for our witness or opening doors for ministry in the community. We have to look back at past miracles and see that there is nothing our God can't do. We have to look at the challenges through God's eyes and know that God has prepared us for victory. Look at all that the Lord has done in the first five chapters to prepare the people for this moment. We must prepare with lots of prayers, Bible study, and a remembrance of all that the Lord has done. Let the Lord prepare you for the task as much as He is preparing the task for you. Go into "battle" with the Lord at your side instead of thinking this is something you are doing for the Lord.

4. Verse 2. What promise did God give to Joshua? What conditions come with the promise, and how is God's promise the fulfillment of promises God made before this day?

The promise is simple. God has delivered Jericho into Joshua's hands. There are no conditions for Joshua or the people. The statement is to let Joshua know that victory is theirs if they follow the Lord. Over the ages, the Canaanites have been immoral people who sacrificed their children and engaged in lewd sexual acts as part of their religion. God promised to punish them and to give the land to Abraham and his descendants. The victory over Jericho will be a punishment of evil and a blessing for the people of God. The people will come to know that this is God's battle. The victory has been won, and all the people have to do is claim the promise and obey their God.

5. Verse 2. What promises has God given you about your ministry? Why is it important to recognize that the battle is God's and not ours?

The Bible is filled with promises of God's presence with us, His desire for our blessing, and His protection. As we approach ministry, it is still essential to see that this is God's battle and not ours. This call from the Lord is a battle for the hearts and souls of every individual on earth. God wants as many people as possible to come to know Him and have saving faith so that they can come to heaven to be with Him. It is not our task to convert people. We only speak so that the word of God can restore them. It is not our job to defeat evil. We are not strong enough to defeat Satan. We do God's will so that our Lord has the opportunity to work through us. To take on this battle as something we do for God encourages defeat. To follow God and do His will opens up the path to victory because we don't get in the way of His work.

6. Verse 3. What is God's plan for the battle? What advantages are there in this plan over just sending the army in to breach the walls?

One might have expected God to send the Israelites into battle against the walls and provide a mighty storm that knocked down the walls in front of them. Instead, they are to march around the city for six days. On the seventh day, the people are to march around the city seven times. This action is a ceremonial

celebration and not a wartime strategy. Seven is God's number throughout scripture and shows the completeness of God's victory. The trumpets went before the ark, proclaiming that the king was here and leading His people to triumph. It was a lesson for the Israelites concerning the power of their God. It was a demonstration of the Lordship of God whose people would shout on the seventh day proclaiming their God to be Lord of all. The plan may have seemed foolish, but Joshua and the people obeyed, and victory was theirs.

7. Verse 3. If God is to be in charge of our ministry, where do we need to start our service? Why is it important to do things God's way?

Too often, we start ministries with meetings and flowcharts. We lay out what we think is the best way to proceed and then have prayers asking God to bless what we have decided. The wise will start with prayer and worship. You have to learn what God wants you to do. It would have been logical to lay siege to Jericho's walls, but that was not God's way. His ways are not always our ways. We listen to Him and obey. In the process, don't be surprised if the Lord doesn't work to grow your faith. He will open doors and let you build your ministry on His miracles, not your efforts. He will teach you to trust Him, even if that means doing things in unusual ways or focusing on celebration and worship rather than getting dirty or using your skills in the field. Start with prayer and follow the Lord, and God will accomplish more than we ever could imagine

8. Verse 8. Who leads the procession with trumpets heralding God's approach? How would this give confidence to the people?

In the battle of Jericho, God would lead the way. The Israelites had trumpets made of silver and ram's horns. The ram's horns used here were used primarily for celebration. They would proclaim that God was leading the celebration and that the city was already defeated. Faith would come for the people because they knew God. The God who had defeated the Egyptians and the kings across the Jordan was again leading them into battle. They would follow Him and defeat the enemy. Faith is not believing or acting despite the evidence. It is believing because you have come to know the Lord. The ark had gone first into the waters of the Jordan, and the people had crossed on dry land. God was going first here, and so the city would be theirs.

9. What part does faith play in a successful ministry? How does God teach us so that we have the confidence necessary to do His work?

Victories in the church come not from our cunning but because we follow the Lord in faith. We can plan, but we do not know the future, nor can we defeat the Devil. God can do both. We must trust Him because we know His character and recall His miracles in our past. We must have confidence in the Lord's desire to reach the lost or help those who are struggling. We believe we are doing what He wants, so we move forward after a lot of prayer and worship to do the will He has revealed to us. Our faith is not in our planning but in God's power. Our belief is not in our resources but in the power and wealth of our God, who can overcome any obstacles and provides His people with what they need. If we are in the word and take the time to thank the Lord for all He has done in the past, we will move forward with confidence in the future.

10. Verse 10. What is God's command given to the people through Joshua concerning their part in the action?

The week was a test of their patience. I imagine that six days of a single walk around the city and then heading back to the camp was nerve-racking for both Canaanites and Israelites. Walking around the city seven times on that last day and only speaking when God gave the long blast on the trumpet was a test of self-control. Many were probably anxious to get on with the invasion. To some, it may have seemed like a waste of time. Yet, God was teaching them obedience. He has His time, and people who follow Him learn

to never be in a hurry. God knows what He is doing and is teaching His people to obey without question. The daily journeys around the city must have also increased tensions in the town to frightening proportions. When the walls did fall, the people of Jericho must have been so terrified that the Israelites had no trouble taking the city.

11. Verse 19. What happens to the wealth of Jericho? What does this action say about the true victor of the battle?

All the silver, gold, and other articles of any value went into the treasury of the Lord. The city would be burned, and the people and animals would be slaughtered. In this way, the people would dedicate Jericho as the first fruits of the land of Palestine for the Lord. They would be free to take homes and vineyards in other places as their own. Riches of the land would belong as an inheritance to the people as the rest of Palestine was conquered. Jericho would be different. The wealth of this city would belong to the Lord as a testament that the battle was His battle and that He had brought victory. They gave everything to the Lord, trusting that He would give them riches from the rest of the region.

12. When ministry does succeed, who should get the glory? Why is this so important to ongoing success?

The glory is the Lord's whenever ministry or life succeeds. If the church gets a windfall, a tithe should go on to another ministry as recognition that the Lord has blessed them. If the program goes well or the church is honored, we must publicly praise the Lord for the success that He brought. By giving glory to the Lord, we let the world see the power and kindness of our Lord. Our first goal is never to make the church grow or look better. We must be about showing the community and our friends how great God is. Celebrate the miracles He does and let others see that the Lord also wants to bless them. We want others to know how great our God is so that they will want to follow Him as well. We often gain more new members by celebrating God's love than by the programs we do in His name.

13. What role does faith play in powerful ministry? What happens if we try to do ministry by ourselves?

We often judge a church or its people by their accomplishments. Has the church grown, or does it have a nice endowment? Jericho teaches us that it is all about faith. The people did nothing to conquer Jericho. God did it all. It was their faith and obedience, however, which allowed the miracle to happen. They had to follow God's will and have the patience and self-control to march around the city and wait for God's time. We still need to believe that God works miracles today and have the patience to listen to His plan and obey His will instead of asking God to bless our tactics. If we try to do ministry by ourselves, we may have some successes, but we will never accomplish what the Lord can do when we listen and believe. Faith allows us to try the impossible. Faith helps us to wait for God's time and way. Faith is powerful and will change the future. We see the power of Joshua's confidence as he never wavers from God's commands but leads people to do miracles at God's command.

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1 What task is the Lord calling you to do that you have been hesitant to start?

Deep 2 What miracles have you seen in your life or ministry that might help you to be more confident of what the Lord can do for you?

Deep 3 What does the story of Jericho teach you about obedience? Why is following God's lead the best plan even if we don't understand what God is doing?

Joshua 6. Disobedience brings defeat

Joshua 7:1-26

Big idea: One sin can have significant effects on others

Was it that big a deal? Out of all the money and possessions of Jericho, Achan took some silver, a bar of gold, and a beautiful robe. Did it matter what he did, or should the Lord have just turned the other cheek? Yes, it did matter. His sin affected the community when 36 people died in a battle that should have been won easily. It impacted the leaders of Israel, who doubted themselves and took the loss of 36 people personally. It affected the nation's trust in the Lord as people wondered if God had brought them to this place to die. They wondered if all the promises of God were false. Finally, it affected his family as they faced the consequences of Achan's sin with him. They knew what he had done and felt they needed to keep silent. One sin impacted everyone in the camp of the Israelites. It was a big deal.

The politician lied to cover up what he had done. The woman had an affair for three months with her boss. The kids stole from Walgreens on the way home. In all three instances, no one got hurt, so we tend to look the other way. Yet, communities still get hurt when a lone gunman kills a dozen kids in a school or a politician steals millions of dollars for supporting a bad bill. A single immoral politician makes us distrust all the politicians around him and may end the career of an honest man or woman who was just too close. The sins of others make us doubt God. Surely, God could have kept the consequences of a person's sin from having such a large impact on all the rest of us. Surely God has failed if He can't call some sins OK if they do little harm to us. We forget the power of sin. It even destroys the people closest to the sinner. A man's affair will ruin a family. A thief thrown in prison will impact his family's ability to feed and clothe themselves. A greedy woman will split a family for years. Sin has consequences, whether we want to call it a sin or not.

The only way to get rid of the consequences of sin is to expose the sin. By a series of lots, Achan is exposed so that the nation might be whole again. Without revealing the sinner, the nation will never be able to take over the Promised Land but will live with the consequences of one sin after another. Our country has to stop ignoring sin or even condoning sinful behavior because there are consequences that will harm us until we expose and punish the sin. We are seeing the breakup of the family, the financial penalties for sinful behavior, and the unraveling of society as each person does what is best for themselves with no regard for others. Such immoral behavior must be shown for what it is. It must be brought into the light, and monuments must be erected that remind us of the harmful effects of such behavior. As we remember the holocaust or the terrors of slavery, we will see what sin can do and why it is so important to avoid it. Evil is powerful and destroys everything around it.

1. What toy did you want as a kid at Christmas? Did you get the toy, or were you left disappointed?

When I was a child, I had two toys that I wanted. I wanted a bicycle, and I wanted a chemistry set. I got both. I played with the chemistry set for a while, but the chemicals soon disappeared after many experiments. The bicycle was a possession I had kept for decades. An updated version of that bicycle was our second "car" at seminary, transporting me back and forth to school while my wife took our one car to work. While I was growing up, it was my freedom as I pedaled around the neighborhood or made grocery store runs for my mom. It was the gift that impacted my life the most in my childhood and never seemed to disappoint me. Let the group talk about gifts they received or never had. Please talk about the impact those gifts had on their lives.

Read Joshua 7:1-26

2. Verse 4. How does Achan's sin affect the community? What attitude about God leads to such sins?

Thirty-six people died in a battle that Israel should have won easily. They had defeated the stronger town of Jericho without losing a single person. The nation's first and only defeat in Canaan would come because of Achan's sin. His sin was typical of the people who had already forgotten what God had done for them. When Joshua sent the spies to survey Ai, they replied that the battle only needed two or three thousand men. No mention was made of God. They were strong enough to win this city without God. Like Achan, they were thinking of themselves and not of the Lord. One assumes that Achan believed that no one would ever know and that the spoils of battle should be his. Achan and the community forget God and pay the price.

3. Verse 4. How can one sin affect a whole community? How does the frequency of sin change how we see it today?

It has often been said that one sin is not very powerful. Yet, a community suffers when a shooter kills children in the local high school. A nation suffers when a politician spends their money or sends their troops into battle for their selfish purposes. We forget the power of one sin to impact all the people around us. Like the Israelites, we forget God and think only about ourselves. The frequency of sin in our society has made us numb to crooked people. Corruption has become no big deal as we hear about scandals almost daily in the news. The regular occurrence of sin tires us out so that we don't have the energy to deal with each situation. Soon one sin builds upon another, the culture has been changed, and sin destroys the nation and all its people.

4. Verse 6. How does Achan's sin and its effect impact the leaders of Israel? How does it make them feel like they failed?

Joshua breaks down. Israel had seemed invincible after crossing the Jordan and destroying Jericho. Now he started having doubts about himself and God's call. Joshua took the loss of the 36 men personally. He had sent them into battle, and they had died. He spent the rest of the day prostrate before the ark of the Lord, pondering what to do next. His actions affected the elders of Israel, who caught his mood of depression. They had sent the army into battle, thinking they could take this small city without relying on God. They did not know that such an attitude had raised itself in the actions of Achan, who thought that he deserved some of the spoils that belonged to God. The nation had not yet learned to depend fully on God.

5. Verse 6. How does the nation's sin impact our leadership and view of leaders?

The sin of a few affects the country. I think back to President Nixon's Watergate scandal or the sexual scandals of President Clinton. Both kept the men from governing well and brought division to our nation. The divisions between the political parties and groups that insist that you approve of their deviant behavior have brought down many good leaders and made many good men and women avoid leadership in our nation. National sin and personal sin make us not trust leaders. We suspect the worst of even good people and want everyone to follow our desires instead of what is best for the nation. Like the Roman Empire of long ago, our sinful desires and divisions can bring down the country and its leaders and keep them from doing what is best for all.

6. Verse 7. How does Achan's sin impact the view that people have of God? Why does it cause them to doubt God's goodness?

In his prayer, Joshua sounds an awful lot like the Jews wandering through the desert. Instead of seeking answers, he feels that God has failed them all and should have just left them in Egypt rather than let them die in Palestine at the hands of the Canaanites. Achan's sin made people doubt God's goodness. God was no longer the deity who fed them in the wilderness, helped them cross the Jordan, or conquered the city of

Jericho. God was the one who caused the deaths of 36 people and who seemed to have abandoned them at the time when they were marching into battles to take the Promised Land. Man sinned, and God gets the blame for the consequences. God will let Joshua and the people wrestle with what has happened before calling them to grow up (v. 10) and letting them know why failure has occurred. It was time for the leaders and the nation to mature in their faith.

7. Verse 7. When sin has consequences, why are we so eager to blame or doubt God for our mistakes? What is the real problem?

When life falls apart, we need to blame someone. It is easier to blame God than to look to ourselves or our nation. America has lost faith in God. Like Achan, we think that we are above God's commands. We act like we are wiser than God. Our nation has a bad habit of trying to do what it thinks is best and rejecting God's will when it doesn't match our sinful desires. When sin brings horrible consequences for our actions, we cry out that the Lord has abandoned us or that the Lord is fickle and cannot be trusted. It is the people of this nation who can't be trusted. Our sins bring the destruction of the family, the poor, and the nation in general. If we were to listen to the Lord, we would not have these challenges. Our sin changes the world, and we shouldn't blame God for the results. We need to get down on our knees and ask for forgiveness and restoration.

8. Verse 25. How does Achan's sin impact his family? Why must they share in the punishment for his sin?

Achan's sin cost his family everything. Deut. 24:16 commands that children not be held responsible for the sins of their parents. The fact that Achan's children are stoned with him shows that they must have been guilty of hiding the silver and the gold. They were accomplices to his crime, and they paid the price. His possessions and his family would be lost because Achan lusted for gold. The punishment fits the crime. Thirty-six people had died because of his sin. It was only appropriate that Achan should lose his life and the lives of his family for causing their death. Many today would call the punishment harsh, but I believe that the ground cried out with the blood of those who died, just as it did in the days of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:10). We need to add Achan's family to those who died because of his greed.

9. How does a person's sin impact their family? Are most of these problems punishments from God or just the consequence of sin?

Families still are feeling the pain of the sin of men and women. If a father commits adultery, it impacts all the children and changes the course of their lives. If a woman steals from her workplace, she can face five or ten years in prison. That, too, will impact the lifestyle and future of the children. We moan that it isn't fair to the children and that they deserve better. We forget that such costs come because of the sin of those who they should be able to look up to and have cared for them. We can't blame God but must condemn the sinner whose family paid a great price because of their sin. Lies, greed, and anger have destroyed families, so they will never speak again. Evil is powerful and often hurts most of those closest to the sinner. As God's people, we must help them come to grips with sin and rebuild their lives in God's mercy.

10. Verse 13. Going back to verse 13, what must the community do to get rid of the consequences of Achan's sin? Why must the hidden sin be exposed?

God's solution for the destruction of sin is to have it removed so that the nation can go forward. The people are to consecrate themselves. They will be in the presence of God and need to bow before the God that they forgot as much as Achan did. God will expose the sin so that the nation can remove it. Without removing the sin, the nation will not be able to go forward and take the land promised to them. One wonders how Achan must have felt as the sacred stones of Urim and Thummim were cast each time so that his tribe, clan, and family were taken. What he thought he had done in secret was now to be exposed.

The sin had caused enough destruction and needed to be removed so that the nation could heal and be restored.

11. Why is it essential to acknowledge sin and not just pretend it is OK? Why must we not just ignore public sins in our society?

Every sin has consequences. We will never be restored when we pretend that sin is not a problem. Like a man on fire who refuses to believe that it causes any harm, we will be scorched and become a pile of charcoal before the sin finally stops destroying those it comes into contact with. We can pretend that sin is not harmful but the consequences of sin show otherwise. The only solution is to throw ourselves at the mercy of God and ask for forgiveness when we sin or when our nation sins. Sin can't be hidden but must be exposed. Those who refuse to repent will face punishment from God and circumstances. Sin will not be allowed to succeed so that it can destroy others. When the nation falls into sin, we need to speak the truth and ask the Lord for help so that God can restore His blessings.

12. Verse 26. What does the community do to remind themselves of the power of sin? What are the consequences for those who forget what sin can do?

They had built a memorial at the camp to remind future generations of God's mercy and miracles. Now they would construct a memorial so that they didn't forget the awful cost of sin. They had become proud and had not paid close attention to the Lord's commands. This heap of stones would remind them that God expects His people to listen to His commands and obey Him. If they didn't follow the Lord, sin would make their world fall apart and affect their nation, leaders, and families. It was a reminder that you can't sin in secret, and you can't expect that there is no price to pay for sin. As with the first memorial, this was a chance to remind future generations of the lessons learned and try to keep history from repeating this painful lesson. The consequences of sin were costly. May future generations learn from Achan and avoid the pain and suffering his sin caused.

13. What can we learn from one sin's effects on all the people in this account? Why must we take sin seriously?

Those who treat sin lightly are bound to pay the price. It would have seemed like this sin was not very bad. There was plenty of gold and other valuables in Jericho. What difference would the theft of a small part of the riches of Jericho make? Like all sin, it destroyed so much. It impacted the nation, its leaders, and the sinner's family. It caused people to doubt God and gave the enemies of Israel a reason to rejoice. Only when we honor and obey God will we have success. You can't fool God, and you can't stop sin's destruction just by ignoring it. Sin must be brought out into the open so that it can be dealt with.

Memorials need to be erected for great sins so that the nations will remember the lessons of sin. It is why we have monuments to the holocaust or even memorials on Civil War battlefields. People died because of what happened, and we never want to forget the lessons of their lives. One sin can be powerful, as we see with Achan. A nation caught in sin will cause a lot of damage, and only by exposing the sin and repenting before God will it bring the healing and restoration we desire.

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1 What does this story tell you about the power of sin? Where do you see damage in our nation because of sin?

Deep 2 What effects can happen in a person's life when they try to hide a sin? Why are confession and forgiveness the only cure for sin and its consequences?

Deep 3 How do you see sin affecting families in our nation? How do we help children who are ravished by the sin of their parents?

Joshua 1. Courage to lead

Joshua 1:1-18

Big idea: Courage comes when you believe in what God can do.

The opportunity lies right before them. Across the Jordan River was the land that the Lord had promised Abraham and Moses. What the Jews needed was a leader who would help them fulfill what God had promised. Joshua has been preparing for this day for forty years, but God still has to give him a pep talk. A half-million people were looking to him for direction after wandering for 40 years. He has to go forward trusting God and leading the people to trust God when their parents failed and died in the desert. He needed to get this right and take advantage of the opportunity. God was ready to help. The first step toward seizing any opportunity is to recognize that the Lord is the source of our strength and power. If we have faith in God, we will have the courage to do what seems impossible. Our faith will impact others and give them courage. The nation was to believe in the Lord so that they could accomplish the promise that God had made to Abraham of Palestine, being theirs. Faith is necessary for the promise to be recovered for another generation.

Opportunities are placed before us by the Lord daily. The challenge is to be ready for them and willing to act. Often we feel overwhelmed by the task that is staring us in the face. We need to hear the promises that God makes to us in scripture and believe that they are true. We need to trust the Lord and rely on His strength, not our own. Such courage comes from being in God's word regularly. Only those who have an intimate relationship with the Lord will know what God has done so that they can trust Him for even greater things in the future. A church with small Bible class attendance will do only small things. They wander like the people of Israel in the desert because they never grasp what God can do. Opportunities come when we are courageous and encourage others to be courageous as well. God is ready to act and calls us to follow Him into the Promised Land of ministry, where we can be part of the miracles He does in the lives of others.

Ministry requires us to step up. Our temptation is to wait for God to call someone else to lead, but God has called and equipped us. We have to believe that God will do through us what He has asked of us. We need to be courageous because we have learned of God's marvelous deeds and character through His word. You can't believe or trust in God if you don't know Him. Only those who have an intimate knowledge of God will do great things. When you see what God is calling you to do, you need to encourage others as God has encouraged you. Leaders do not work in a vacuum; God uses them to prepare others for the opportunity as God has prepared them. God has lifted you so that you can lift them and let them succeed in their ministries. Finally, you build a team. There are a few times when God calls us to work alone. He has gifted others with gifts you don't have and that you need to take advantage of the prospects before your church or small group. God doesn't give us opportunities until we are capable of success. We need to trust Him and know that He has given us what we need to accomplish the tasks that He has given us.

1. Who is a leader you have admired in life or American history? What qualities do you see in them that you wish you had?

Read Joshua 1:1-18

2. Verse 2-3. What task is the Lord giving Joshua? What opportunity is he to grasp with God's help?

- 3. Verse 2. When God called Joshua to succeed Moses, why was it necessary to be himself and not a second Moses? How has God specifically created you for the opportunities ahead?**
- 4. Verse 4-5. What promises does God make to Joshua and the people? How have God's past actions shown them that God can accomplish what He proposes?**
- 5. Verse 5. Think about the promises of God in the Bible. Which promises do you want to claim as you look at the opportunities God has given you?**
- 6. Verse 6. What encouragement does God give to His servant? Why is this necessary if Joshua is to be successful in his task?**
- 7. Verse 6. What is the source of courage that God wants us to have? Why must we look at God's strength and not our own?**
- 8. Verse 8. What is God's command to Joshua? What will the study of the Bible accomplish?**
- 9. Why is Bible study so essential before a congregation and its leaders can use the opportunities God has given them?**
- 10. Verse 11. Having received God's encouragement, what is vital to the nation's success? Why must He encourage others?**
- 11. Who do you need to encourage or mentor if your congregation or group is going to be ready for the challenges and ministry ahead?**
- 12. Verse 16-17. How do the people respond to Joshua's message? How do they encourage Joshua in return?**
- 13. As you look at this chapter and the last paragraph of the introduction above, what steps are needed to become a leader? Why is each step important to your success?**

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1. How do you think Joshua felt when he realized God was calling him to lead the nation? How have you felt when asked to do a big task at church or in life?

Deep 2. What stories in the Bible or your life remind you of God's character or faithfulness and encourage you to lead others in ministry?

Deep 3. What task do you feel called to do in ministry, and who do you want to partner with you in that effort?

Joshua 2. The Power of One Faith

Josh 2:1-24

Big idea: Never underestimate what God can do through one person.

The story of Rahab is the story of how one person's faith changed everything. She chose to follow the true God and leave the gods of Jericho behind. On that day, she became an Israelite and was no longer a Canaanite. She did so because she saw what others had missed. Even most Israelites didn't understand God's miracles in the desert or the victories over mighty nations like Egypt and East Jordan. She was drawn to this God who could not be defeated and could take care of His people in the desert. Her faith would inspire others. First, the spies drew courage from her, and later the whole nation of Israel would do so. While others in Jericho were afraid of the Israelites and their God, she saw His mercy and kindness and asked for God's blessing on her family and herself. She believed that the Lord would accept them into His people. God rewards her, and she becomes an ancestor of Jesus. Her faith gave people the courage to do the miracles of God.

Too often, we feel that our life is too small to accomplish anything significant for God. Rahab helps us to see how our lives can change everything as well. It all begins with faith. The faithful will take risks because they believe in what God can do. They will speak to others about their faith and take on the challenging tasks in ministry. They do things by God's strength and not their own. They trust that God will provide for His church and stand by His people. They long to be part of God's plan and not just sit on the sidelines. They know that God can change lives by the simple things they do in God's name. Such faith inspires others. They see what this person does and want to join in on what God is doing through them. Their faith grows as they participate in the work and miracles that God is doing through those who believe. Others even gain a heart for those around them. Faith has a purpose, and that purpose is to help others grow in their relationship with the Lord so they can have His blessings. It doesn't take an army to do great things for the Lord. It often takes only one person with a strong faith who is willing to be used by God and attracts others to work with them.

She was a harlot from a pagan culture whose faith inspired everyone around her. Her faith makes a difference in creating confidence for the spies and the nation because she is open to the miracles of God. We need to remember that no person is too small or has too shady a past for them to be used by God. Faith overcomes our shortcomings, for it relies on the power of God and not our abilities or merit. Such faith will transform your life and the lives of those around you. You will save others by your witness and let the Lord work miracles through your ministry. One person can do enormous things if they work and live by faith. They will take risks and boldly go forward because they trust in the Lord. They will encourage others, and soon a small army is working miracles in ministry because they believe in the power of their God. Faith gives God the chance to do miracles through you and me. Faith can change our whole world.

1. What dangers do you think third-world people have just because they are Christian?

Read Josh 2:1-24

2. Verse 1 What is the spies' mission, and why do they stay with Rahab when they visit the city?

3. Verses 3-4 What is the king's command, and what is Rahab's response? How is her response an act of faith?

- 4. Verse 4. In what way does faith allow us to take risks in ministry? What makes those risks worthwhile?**
- 5. Verse 9. What has faith allowed Rahab to see that the others miss? How has this knowledge given her courage?**
- 6. Verse 9. Why is faith necessary to follow the Lord? What does faith allow us to see?**
- 7. Verse 11 What does Rahab confess about the God of Israel? How does this set her apart from the others in Jericho?**
- 8. Verse 11. How can the strong faith of one person inspire others? How does it move others to act for the Lord?**
- 9. Verse 12. Who is Rahab concerned about when the destruction comes? What is she asking for beyond safety?**
- 10. How has your faith changed your family? Why is faith the greatest gift we can give to those we love?**
- 11. Verse 24. How does Rahab's faith impact the nation of Israel? What insight does she give to them about the future?**
- 12. How does one faithful person change the climate of a whole group of people so that they can do great things?**
- 13. What does this passage teach us about the power of one faithful person? What would it take you to be such a person?**

For now or later - taking the next step.

Deep 1 What is one place where you feel you need to stand for your beliefs no matter the consequences?

Deep 2 What holds you back from trusting the Lord and taking a leap of faith?

Deep 3 What would you like your family to learn about God from your faith and actions?

Joshua 3. God leads the way

Josh 3:1-17

Big idea: Faith goes forward to where God is working.

They must have wondered how they would cross the river. Two spies could swim their way across or travel in a small boat. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children with all their worldly possessions would never make it across the swollen river. It was time for the people of Israel to have faith. God would lead them and open the way to the land that He promised. He would go first, but they would need to follow. The priests would have to step into the flooded river before the waters would recede. The people would have to follow, or they would lose everything as their parents had forty years before. God was teaching them to trust Him and learn to follow Him wherever he led them. They would take the Promised Land by faith, obeying God as they went into battle and took the land inch by inch. That would never happen without faith. Here at the river, they would learn to trust God and see what the Almighty could do. Only then would they be ready to take Palestine as their own.

It would be easier if God did miracles first and proved Himself to us each time before we had to obey. God does miracles, but we often have to remember what He has done in the past so that we have faith and see miracles in the present. Like the Israelites, we need to remember that the Lord is at our side. We need to spend time praying and studying the Word to find what God is calling us to do. Too often, we have meetings and plans first and expect God to bless our plans. God must determine the course, for He alone has the power and wisdom to make ministry happen. We must obey when God calls, trusting Him even before the miracles happen. Our leaders often go first, and the congregation or small group follows their lead. If we don't trust the Lord, we lose the blessings that God wants to give. If we obey the Lord, we grow in faith and are ready for even greater blessings in the future. Faith often moves forward in ministry one step at a time.

Too often, we think that faith is only about getting to heaven and avoiding hell. It is about life. The Promised Land is as much about this life as it is about the next. It is about having the faith to move forward in our relationship with the Lord and live in His blessings each day. Obedience is required for that to happen. We can't expect God to make everything easy so that we have the confidence to go forward in life and ministry. Often, we step out into challenging waters trusting the Lord will move the mountains for us. God wants to use every situation as a chance for us to grow in faith and build our relationship with Him. He wants us to move forward in life so that we create a life dependent on Him and beneficial to others. God saved us so that we might be people who live by faith. Churches and Christians that wait for God to make things easy will never accomplish much. God's people are to move forward boldly so that we show God's power to the world.

1. What is the biggest river that you have ever seen? (Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, other?) What would it take for a large number of people to cross the river without a bridge?

Read Joshua 3:1-17

2. Verse 3. How did the people know when it was safe to cross the river?

3. Verse 3. Why must God lead in ministry? Why will we fail if we try to direct God?

4. Verse 5. Why did the people need to consecrate themselves before crossing the river?

5. Verse 5. How do we prepare for ministry, and why is this so necessary?

- 6. Verse 6. Who must be the first to trust God before the people will do so? What were the people to learn from this act of faith?**
- 7. Verse 6. Why must leaders show their faith before the congregation or group will follow?**
- 8. Verse 7. How did God encourage Joshua, and why did God do it in front of the priests?**
- 9. Verse 9. How was the river crossing a sign from God and a test of the Israelites?**
- 10. Why is faith so necessary before God can bless us? How is each challenge an opportunity for us to grow?**
- 11. Verse 15. What act of faith is necessary before the miracle can begin in the water? Why must they obey before miracles can happen?**
- 12. Why does God often make us take the first step before miracles and blessings can come?**
- 13. What does this passage teach us about faith and ministry? Why is salvation just the beginning of our walk with God?**

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1 How is ministry a series of faith-filled steps?

Deep 2 How important is obedience to the Lord in having a successful ministry?

Deep 3 What step is God calling you to take so that your ministry goes forward?

Joshua 4. Remember God's help

Josh 4:1-19

Big idea: Remembering God is the key to a better present and future.

Joshua 4 is a story about the first memorials that Joshua would set up in the land of Palestine. God's people often forget what God has done for them, so these memorials were to remind future generations what the Lord had accomplished here at the Jordan River. A memorial was set up at the camp of the Israelites after they crossed the river. They could touch the stones from the raging river and let the rocks remind them of their crossing to this new life. The days of wandering were over, and God had transformed His people and their future. They would have a home in Palestine that is their home to this day. The rocks also confirmed that Joshua was God's servant. The miracle happened just as he said it would. It also showed God's ability; they would learn to trust Him as they took this new land and made it their own. This memorial would mark for generations that their mighty God kept His promises and that the future was secure if they trusted Him.

Memorials cover our nation. Battlefields like Gettysburg and Vicksburg are filled with monuments to the bravery of winners and losers. Mount Rushmore honors four of the presidents who changed our country. We need memorials to remind us of great presidents, battles, and events that changed our world. Without them, we would forget the past. Churches put up walls of memories to remind them of times when the Lord worked miracles in their midst. Such stories and artifacts remind us of what God has done and will continue to do for His church if they look to Him for help. God wants us to see that the church's history is not filled with luck but with men and women who believed in their God so much that they were willing to take risks. They are not heroes but are simply people of faith. They trusted God and can teach us to trust the Lord as well. Memorials ultimately recognize what God has done in the past so that we will trust Him in the future.

Memorials are to encourage future generations (verses 21-22). The children would ask what these stones meant, and it was a time to teach them about the goodness of God. Only when the power of God stopped the water were these stones accessible. They were to be something they could touch and see to feel firsthand the power of a miracle. Visual symbols or pictures should fill our homes with reminders to help our children see the greatness of God. We want them to understand that God still works miracles for His people and will continue to be there throughout their lives. We also desire that memorials encourage the world around us. Canaanite spies in the hills saw the Jordan River stop so the people could cross. These stones served as a reminder for them that God was almighty and was to be respected. The cross on the church or the nativity scene on the lawn tells the story of God's love and encourages people to claim Him as their God. Remembering God is the key to a better present and future.

1. What is your strongest memory of your childhood?

Read Josh 4:1-19

2. Verse 6. What did God command Joshua to do as they finished crossing the Jordan River? What was the value of this memorial?

3. Verse 6. What Bible story would you like your children to remember? Why?

4. Verse 9. Why did Joshua put up a second memorial by the river? What did that memorial symbolize?

5. Verse 9. What memorials do you have at your church? What do they symbolize to you?
6. Verse 14. What did the miracle at the crossing show the people about Joshua? Why was that important to their future?
7. Verse 14. Why is it necessary for the church to honor its leaders? Why is it important to respect our church leaders?
8. Verse 18. What did the miracles teach the people about God? How was faith in God necessary for the days to come?
9. How does God build faith in Himself in the church? What are the benefits of seeing God's hands in the miracles around us?
10. Verse 21. How were the stones a teaching tool for the next generation? Why would that be so important?
11. Why is God so concerned about the next generation of Jews and Christians?
12. Verse 24. What would these memorials tell the world about the true God?
13. What event do you want your friends and children to remember so they see that God has been with you?

For now or later - taking the next step.

Deep 1 What would have stuck with you if you had crossed with the Jews? Would it have been the crunch of the stones on the dry riverbed? Is it the sight of water stopping when the ark entered the river, or is it something else?

Deep 2 What miracle have you seen that you will never forget? How has it changed your life?

Deep 3 What picture, statute, or other reminders would you like to place in your home to remind you of God's greatness?

Joshua 5. Do it God's Way

Josh 6:1-19

Big idea: God's people overcome the world by faith

As the Israelites gazed at the city of Jericho, conquering the city must have seemed impossible. The city had two walls and strong defenses behind them. Any attack on the town would be a suicide mission. God would do the impossible, but He would do it in a way that built faith as it tore down walls. God had prepared the city for conquest. The inhabitants were in a panic, having heard how God had stopped the Jordan River and the people walked on dry land. The Israelites were primed for a lesson. The battle would be fought on God's terms so that the people could see the full power of what their God could do. Faith would grow as the people did what seemed ludicrous because God said to do so. Their obedience would open up the door for victory. In the end, they learned to trust God and believed that the rest of the battles would be won by God as well. Faith would triumph, and a miracle would unfold before their eyes.

There are days when we wonder if the church will survive. The giants we face seem as impossible to conquer as the city of Jericho. Our challenge, like many in Israel, is one of faith. We are often more afraid of the culture than our culture is of the church. God is still working behind the scenes so that we might succeed with the gospel, but we are shaking in our boots. We must remember that this is God's battle for the hearts and souls of the people around us. If we are going to battle with the enemy as we try and bring friends and relatives the gospel, we need to begin with prayer. We have to get instructions from God before we act. Miracles will happen, but they will only happen if we follow God's plans for us and our ministry. We also have to believe. God's victories will not come because of our cunning or abilities. The triumph comes because we follow God and do as He calls us to do. We look back and see all the ways that God has done miracles for us and the church in the past so that we dare to move forward and see miracles today. God's people overcome the world by walking in faith.

It is all about faith. God purposely gave the city of Jericho into the hands of Israel so that both Israel and the Canaanites knew that it was God who had brought the victory. It gave the Israelites the faith to go further and take the rest of Palestine. We have to believe that God is working miracles today among us. We can be afraid of the tasks God gives us to do, like sharing our faith with a friend or taking on a mission with finances or children at our church, or we can pray and ask the Lord to lead us. He may take us in a direction we don't expect, but those who follow the Lord will see Him use His power to conquer the world with the gospel. We know that God has been working behind the scenes. We must also believe that God will work through us so that the world sees how great our God is. Faith that follows the Lord will overcome the world.

1. What is the most intimidating thing you have ever been asked to do? What made it so hard for you to do?

Read Josh 6:1-19

2. Verse 1. Describe the state of affairs in Jericho. How are the people feeling? How has the Lord prepared the Israelites for this day?

3. Verse 1. How do you feel when looking at a task that will take a miracle to overcome? What do you need if you are going to feel comfortable with your service for the Lord?

4. Verse 2. What promise did God give to Joshua? What conditions come with the promise, and how is God's promise the fulfillment of promises God made before this day?

- 5. Verse 2. What promises has God given you about your ministry? Why is it important to recognize that the battle is God's and not ours?**
- 6. Verse 3. What is God's plan for the battle? What advantages are there in this plan over just sending the army in to breach the walls?**
- 7. Verse 3. If God is to be in charge of our ministry, where do we need to start our service? Why is it important to do things God's way?**
- 8. Verse 8. Who leads the procession with trumpets heralding God's approach? How would this give confidence to the people?**
- 9. What part does faith play in a successful ministry? How does God teach us so that we have the confidence necessary to do His work?**
- 10. Verse 10. What is God's command given to the people through Joshua concerning their part in the action?**
- 11. Verse 19. What happens to the wealth of Jericho? What does this action say about the true victor of the battle?**
- 12. When ministry does succeed, who should get the glory? Why is this so important to ongoing success?**
- 13. What role does faith play in powerful ministry? What happens if we try to do ministry by ourselves?**

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1 What task is the Lord calling you to do that you have been hesitant to start?

Deep 2 What miracles have you seen in your life or ministry that might help you to be more confident of what the Lord can do for you?

Deep 3 What does the story of Jericho teach you about obedience? Why is following God's lead the best plan even if we don't understand what God is doing?

Joshua 6. Disobedience brings defeat

Joshua 7:1-26

Big idea: One sin can have significant effects on others

Was it that big a deal? Out of all the money and possessions of Jericho, Achan took some silver, a bar of gold, and a beautiful robe. Did it matter what he did, or should the Lord have just turned the other cheek? Yes, it did matter. His sin affected the community when 36 people died in a battle that should have been won easily. It impacted the leaders of Israel, who doubted themselves and took the loss of 36 people personally. It affected the nation's trust in the Lord as people wondered if God had brought them to this place to die. They wondered if all the promises of God were false. Finally, it affected his family as they faced the consequences of Achan's sin with him. They knew what he had done and felt they needed to keep silent. One sin impacted everyone in the camp of the Israelites. It was a big deal.

The politician lied to cover up what he had done. The woman had an affair for three months with her boss. The kids stole from Walgreens on the way home. In all three instances, no one got hurt, so we tend to look the other way. Yet, communities still get hurt when a lone gunman kills a dozen kids in a school or a politician steals millions of dollars for supporting a bad bill. A single immoral politician makes us distrust all the politicians around him and may end the career of an honest man or woman who was just too close. The sins of others make us doubt God. Surely, God could have kept the consequences of a person's sin from having such a large impact on all the rest of us. Surely God has failed if He can't call some sins OK if they do little harm to us. We forget the power of sin. It even destroys the people closest to the sinner. A man's affair will ruin a family. A thief thrown in prison will impact his family's ability to feed and clothe themselves. A greedy woman will split a family for years. Sin has consequences, whether we want to call it a sin or not.

The only way to get rid of the consequences of sin is to expose the sin. By a series of lots, Achan is exposed so that the nation might be whole again. Without revealing the sinner, the nation will never be able to take over the Promised Land but will live with the consequences of one sin after another. Our country has to stop ignoring sin or even condoning sinful behavior because there are consequences that will harm us until we expose and punish the sin. We are seeing the breakup of the family, the financial penalties for sinful behavior, and the unraveling of society as each person does what is best for themselves with no regard for others. Such immoral behavior must be shown for what it is. It must be brought into the light, and monuments must be erected that remind us of the harmful effects of such behavior. As we remember the holocaust or the terrors of slavery, we will see what sin can do and why it is so important to avoid it. Evil is powerful and destroys everything around it.

1. What toy did you want as a kid at Christmas? Did you get the toy, or were you left disappointed?

Read Joshua 7:1-26

2. Verse 4. How does Achan's sin affect the community? What attitude about God leads to such sins?

3. Verse 4. How can one sin affect a whole community? How does the frequency of sin change how we see it today?

4. Verse 6. How does Achan's sin and its effect impact the leaders of Israel? How does it make them feel like they failed?

- 5. Verse 6. How does the nation's sin impact our leadership and view of leaders?**
- 6. Verse 7. How does Achan's sin impact the view that people have of God? Why does it cause them to doubt God's goodness?**
- 7. Verse 7. When sin has consequences, why are we so eager to blame or doubt God for our mistakes? What is the real problem?**
- 8. Verse 25. How does Achan's sin impact his family? Why must they share in the punishment for his sin?**
- 9. How does a person's sin impact their family? Are most of these problems punishments from God or just the consequence of sin?**
- 10. Verse 13. Going back to verse 13, what must the community do to get rid of the consequences of Achan's sin? Why must the hidden sin be exposed?**
- 11. Why is it essential to acknowledge sin and not just pretend it is OK? Why must we not just ignore public sins in our society?**
- 12. Verse 26. What does the community do to remind themselves of the power of sin? What are the consequences for those who forget what sin can do?**
- 13. What can we learn from one sin's effects on all the people in this account? Why must we take sin seriously?**

For now or later - taking the next step

Deep 1 What does this story tell you about the power of sin? Where do you see damage in our nation because of sin?

Deep 2 What effects can happen in a person's life when they try to hide a sin? Why are confession and forgiveness the only cure for sin and its consequences?

Deep 3 How do you see sin affecting families in our nation? How do we help children who are ravished by the sin of their parents?

About the author

Rev. Mark Etter has been a pastor for over forty years and is the retired pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Erlanger, KY. Rev. Etter has published several books of Adult Bible studies and numerous devotions and youth studies with Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis. He has been active in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod as an LWML counselor, evangelism chairman, coach for pastors, and circuit counselor. He and his wife, Joan, have three grown children and three grandchildren.

Did you know?

Here are seven questions that are answered in this study. The page and question number in this study are given after each question.

1. Why is Bible study so essential before a congregation and its leaders can use the opportunities God has given them? (Page 7, Question 9)
2. In what way does faith allow us to take risks in ministry? What makes those risks worthwhile? (Page 10, Question 4)
3. How does Rahab's faith impact the nation of Israel? What insight does she give to them about the future? (Page 12, Question 11)
4. Why did the Israelites need to consecrate themselves before crossing the Jordan River? (Page 14, Question 4)
5. What did the two memorials that Joshua put up tell the world about the true God? (Page 20, Question 12)
6. As they march around Jericho, who leads the way? How does this give confidence to the people? (Page 24, Question 8)
7. How does Achan's sin affect the community? What made him think that his sin was not important? (Page 26, Question 2)

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