



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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HERE'S WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

Joshua: Obtaining Victory in the Christian Life
Joshua 1:1-9

I'll be teaching through the book of Joshua over the next several weeks. There's a key thought that I want to keep coming back to as we meander through this book: how to obtain spiritual victories. So the goal is that we will be able to come and understand how to apply God's word to our lives in particular ways.

Joshua's chosen by God and by Moses to complete the work of leading the people into the Promised Land. That's his job. That's what he's going to do. He made mistakes, he had victories, he faced challenges in difficult situations. We're going to examine his life and we're going to learn from him. That's where we're headed.

Now before we go any further, I want to pause for a moment and I want to talk to you about how to study the Bible. How do we get the ideas from Joshua's life and get them into our own life? That's the question. How do we make that bridge?

Let me just explain three steps that you always want to take when you're trying to take the ideas from God's word and turn them into something in your own heart. Ready? Three steps. Not just in the book of Joshua, but these three steps will be used no matter what book we're studying or wherever you open the scriptures.

Step number one is interpretation. The whole idea of interpretation is to find out what the Bible means by what it says. In other words, what did the author mean when he wrote the book? What did he mean by that passage, those words that he used? The first thing we're going to do is find out what the passage meant. That is interpretation.

The second step is to identify a principle. A principle is a timeless truth that extends out of the current situation - wherever we read that passage - out of that, into life. It can be applied to anybody from any point in history, like us; anyone in any culture, anybody of any age. In other words, the principle is a timeless truth. That's what we call principles: a timeless truth.

If we look at the verse that we're memorizing about this Book of the Law, it says *meditate on it day and night*. The idea of meditation on God's word is something that anyone can do in any culture, any history. It becomes a principle, a timeless truth that we can take and say, "All Christians or all those who are God-followers of any age, period of time, can meditate on God's word and should be meditating on God's word." That's a principle.

From the principle we go to step number three. So first we had interpretation and then we identified a principle, a timeless truth. We go to an application. Applications are different for every one of us. The application for you may be different than the application for me. When it says *meditate on God's word*, what does that mean for you? For some of you that means you're going to listen to sermons on the radio and you're going to allow them to influence your life. That's meditating on God's word. For others of you, you're going to memorize a passage of scripture or this verse, Joshua 1:8. It's going to become inside of you so that you can be thinking about it, so you can meditate on it. For others, you're going to put up little signs in your house, little pieces of papers or cards that are going to have Bible verses on them so you can meditate on God's word. Those are applications. The application for each person is different.

We start with interpretation. There's only one interpretation that the Bible has. We're trying to figure out what it is. Secondly, there are principles, usually many principles that come out of a passage. And thirdly, there are a myriad of applications that we can use to apply to our lives. That's how we study the Bible and that's what we're going to do as we go forward into this book of Joshua: find principles and then applications that we can apply to our own hearts and lives.

God made a promise to Abraham four hundred years earlier than the passage we're talking about now in Joshua. He told Abraham, "I'm going to give you this land and all this place you're walking is going to be the Promised Land that I've given you." That's why it's called the Promised Land. It's a land promised to Abraham.

But as years passed, things continued on. Abraham's grandson and his family all moved to Egypt under Joseph's leadership. There were seventy of them who went to Egypt. Just seventy people, but God blessed them and they began to multiply. So as they were living there, the Egyptians became afraid of their growing population and decided to make them slaves, had them building these buildings or cities that they wanted built.

But that didn't stop the growth among the Israelite people. They continued to grow and their population increased all the more until one day, God provided a deliverer whose name was Moses who brought them out of Egypt and took them on a path toward the Promised Land. God gave them the Law through Moses. Lots of things happened in the wilderness as they were learning how to trust the Lord in this new way. They came to the edge of the Promised Land and they were getting ready to go in.

They sent twelve spies into the land. Ten of the spies came back and said, "We cannot do this. This isn't going to work for us." Two of them said, "Yes we can do this. We can do it." In fact, I want to take you to the words in Numbers 13:30 where Caleb and Joshua were speaking to the people who were saying, "We can't do this. Oh we've got to turn back. We can't go into the Promised Land because it's too hard. We're afraid of this."

In Numbers 13:30 it says, *Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."* So I want you to remember that Joshua, this guy now, that we're going to talk about, has already been into the Promised Land. He's already seen it, he knows what it looks like, and he's ready to trust the Lord as he moves forward.

Now it's his job to lead the people forward and that's what this book of Joshua is all about. As we go through this book of Joshua, I'd like you to consider yourself a Joshua: someone that God has entrusted something to, some leadership in one way or another to go into the Promised Land. Just leading your own life may be all that He has for you, but you have a responsibility to follow His leadership. He's going to lead the people into the Promised Land, this land flowing with milk and honey. We're going to watch him interact with people, we're going to watch him interact with God, we're going to watch him interact with the enemy. We're going to learn a lot about God and we're going to learn a lot about our relationships together as he moves into the Promised Land and takes over that land.

Here's some benefits from studying this book. One: we'll understand the intensity of spiritual warfare and the need to trust God at every step. We'll see how Joshua thought to himself, "I can handle this," and then realizes that he didn't seek the Lord and gets himself into trouble.

We'll also learn how God is merciful, the God of the second chances. We'll see how God forgives and provides new opportunities for Joshua after failure. We're also going to be encouraged to step out into our faith and trust the Lord to overcome huge challenges that we have in our lives. Joshua had to overcome some major things as he moved forward to conquer the land. We're going to learn theology, about how God loves us and cares for us and empowers us and is with us. We're also going to learn to take sin seriously as we see the consequences of failure and rebellion. I think we're going to find this book to be very relevant and practical to our lives as we're trying to live the Christian life.

The book of Joshua falls into three main divisions. The first division is chapters 1-4, which talk about the entry into the Promised Land. So if you're at a place in your life where you're trying to move from the wilderness into the blessings of the Christian life, you're going to want to particularly pay attention right here. What does it mean to enter into the Promised Land, or, for us, enter into the blessings of the Christian life? That's chapters 1-4.

Chapters 5-21 really teach us a lot about the conquest; how he goes into the land and they start conquering all of the enemies in the land. We're going to learn a lot during that about handling the conflicts and the challenges we face as we go into the Promised Land, the Christian life, in our own ways, and we try to deal with the enemies that are there, the things that are hindering us from enjoying the blessing of being in the Promised Land.

Then chapter 22-24 are a special part of the book where we actually have Joshua's own words as he's speaking. We'll learn some valuable things about staying on track and following the Lord in the midst of that challenge of being in the Promised Land or in the Christian life.

So we're going to find a lot of valuable things as we study this whole book of the Bible. I want you to turn with me to Joshua 1:1-2 and let's jump into what we have here.

Joshua 1:1-2 says, *After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. The reason I've chosen these nine verses to look at today is because this is God's message to Joshua. Notice here in verse 1 it's saying that*

God spoke to Joshua and He said these things. So the first nine verses are the dialogue between God and Joshua about what he is to do and what that's going to look like in practical terms. I just want you to see that as we're going through. That's why we're looking at nine verses.

I can imagine that many of the Israelites were feeling like everything's lost now that Moses is dead. "He was our leader. He took us through all of these things and helped us move forward." And Moses had been a great leader. He had done a number of amazing things in leading the people out of Egypt through the wilderness to Mount Sinai and to get the Law, and then after that all the way through the wilderness to where they were, and then forty more years of wandering. Moses had been the leader all of that time and now he's dead. Things are in a position of change, a position of flux.

I think this is an excellent book to study if you've got some major changes going on in your life. Maybe you've got a new job. Or maybe you've got a new child. Or maybe you've got a new relationship that you're involved in. Or maybe you've got something new happening in your life. Great time to reflect it because now God is saying to Joshua, "We're going to do something new. It's not going to be the same as with Moses anymore; it's something new."

But it may be just that you want to say to the Lord, "Lord, I want this to be a new time in my life. I want to move into the victories of the Christian life in a way that I've not been able to do before. That's where I want to go and I really need you to speak to me as I go into this new place in my life." That's what God is doing for Joshua because things are going to be very different now.

If you think about the way people lived up until this point, they were led all around the wilderness by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God led the people that way. That's not going to happen anymore. Now He's going to speak through someone like Joshua.

It used to be that there was manna provided for them every morning, Sunday through Friday, and it would only last one day. If you kept it longer for a day, thinking you wouldn't want to collect it the next day, it would rot, worms would be in it. So you got in the habit of collecting only one day's worth of manna. Except on Friday you would collect two days worth of manna and God would miraculously protect the manna so it would last two days and it wouldn't rot those two days. You were in a habit of receiving those blessings from God. That's not going to happen now.

Now they're going to the Promised Land. And in the Promised Land they're going to have to live differently. They used to live in tents, portable tents, and they would move around from place to place. That's not going to be the same anymore. Now they're going to be living in permanent dwellings. Now they're going to build cities. It's going to be different. They're going to go in and conquer this land. It's not going to be an easy thing. I can imagine for Joshua and for the people this is a little bit overwhelming. They're saying to themselves, "Oh man. This is so different."

I think the Christian life can be overwhelming sometimes for us. You read verses like *pray without ceasing*. That's a little overwhelming, isn't it? Or *meditate on the scriptures days and*

night. That's overwhelming. Or *do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together* (in other words, go to church regularly). That can be overwhelming.

There are a lot of things that can be overwhelming about the Christian life, especially when God calls us personally to do something about something inside of our hearts that He wants to change. That can be challenging. It's important for us to do it the way God wants and we need to know how to respond.

There are going to be several principles that we're going to identify in this passage. Four truths that I think we all need as we go into something new in our lives. Four principles that are going to be shared with Joshua here by God in this dialogue between God and Joshua in the first nine verses in the book of Joshua.

Verse 2-5 are going to talk about what God's going to do and then verse 6-9 talk about what Joshua needs to do. Let's read on in verses 2 and following.

Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them. Notice he's talking about what he's going to do. I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

He's saying you're going to have victory in your pursuits. He's reminding Joshua of some very important truths that I think we need to be reminded of in our own lives. First of all, I want you to see that the promises being given are coming from God. That's what He's saying. "I will do this. I will do that." They're not coming from Moses.

It's tempting for us to think that our promises are somehow tied into our life situation now. You need to know that God is the one who is the blesser. He's the one who comes up with the promises. He's the one who provides them for us. And He wants Joshua to know that. "I am going to give you these things." Joshua needs to know that it wasn't Moses that made them successful all of these years so far. It wasn't Moses who led them, it was God who was leading them. They need to rely on God, not on a man. So that's what they're learning how to do here. Just because Moses died, doesn't mean that the work and the promise of God would die out.

We're in a journey too. We're in a journey to find the fullness that God wants for us and the gifts that we receive are the gifts that come from God Himself.

The New Testament also shares this idea about God providing gifts for us. And we need to recognize and thank Him for all the gifts that He provides us on a regular basis. James 1:17 says, *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.* God is the giver of good gifts. We want to enjoy that and we want to thank Him for it and recognize it as grace at work within us.

In order for Joshua to be successful in this work that God is calling him to do, he needs to understand a very important concept and that is this principle that we need to recognize: God is always with you. You see the end of that verse there? Always with you. Never leave us or forsake us. He's always with us. Those are really powerful words.

When we need comforting, God is there to comfort us. Those words are there to protect us when temptation starts to direct us in a particular way. God is with you. We walk everyday in the presence of God and it changes how we live. If you're feeling discouraged, God will be with you. If you're feeling tempted, God will be with you. If you're feeling lonely, God will be with you. If you're feeling proud, God is with you, you better be careful. So there's a sense of always recognizing that God is with us. It keeps us on track, keeps us encouraged, keeps us moving along in a way that is significant and helpful.

You've seen this poem, but I just want to draw your attention to it again. It's the poem called *Footprints in the Sand* that reminds us about God's ever-presence with us. It says:

“One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there was only one.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,
‘You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?’

The Lord replied,
‘The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child,
is when I carried you.’”

A very important reality that Joshua needed to recognize in his life is that God will always be with us, He will never forsake us. There are some times on Sunday morning when we pray and are led in worship that we say, “Lord, we want to come into your presence.” I like saying those words. We need to recognize that God is always with us no matter where we are. But there are some times when we're going along and we're not with Him, we're not in His presence. So those

words don't say "God, you're not here," they say, "Lord we want to come in and experience your presence; we want to enjoy the presence of God this morning as we worship you."

That's what we're talking about as we see this particular principle: to recognize that God is always with you. If you're going to be a leader, if you're going to move into this change point, Joshua, you need to know that God is always with you.

Let's go to principle number two. Starts in verse 6. Principle number two is *Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them*. And he repeats it in verse 7. *Be strong and very courageous*. He repeats it again in verse 9. *Be strong and courageous*.

What is courage? Well, courage has a lot of synonyms – valor, fearlessness, heroism, confidence, nerve. It also has nicknames like guts and grit and backbone. We see courage in David when he marched into that valley and fought the giant. We see courage with Moses standing eye to eye with Pharaoh. We see courage when Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Courage is best seen in the midst of conflict and struggle.

That's why we see courage in a dad who chooses to pray with his family, a single mom who hangs in there day after day. We see courage in this student who speaks out for Jesus in class or to friends. We see courage in the person who faces a medical challenge and chooses to honor God when talking to the doctors or nurses. That's courage. We need to all be strong and courageous.

Why did God tell Joshua that he needed to be courageous? What was Joshua going to face? What challenges would he face that would require such courage? Besides being the leader, God had given Joshua a job to complete. Leading the people in to the land and conquering the land with them; that was the challenge that God gave to Joshua and the people.

Sounds like an easy job if you're trusting in the Lord. I mean, God did all these other things; He could just do this too. But it was very difficult for the people of that time, which I think is so comforting to us because I think the challenges we face are very difficult to face as well. Forty years before, remember, Moses sent twelve spies into the land. Ten of them came back and said, "We can't do this. It's a great land, flowing with milk and honey, but the people are huge. Makes us feel like grasshoppers." When we face the challenges of our lives, the same thing happens. We are sometimes afraid to enter the Promised Land. So He's saying don't be afraid. You need to choose courage. *Be strong and courageous*.

There were seven nations in Canaan. As Joshua's going to come in, he's going to take over all these nations. There are seven nations, many of them bigger and stronger than the people of Israel. By human standards it was an uphill battle. But it's very important to recognize that God is with him and therefore he can be strong and courageous.

Courage is an important quality that we all need in our lives. When we don't have courage, that's when we end up failing in one way or another. Abraham lied in Egypt and lying is often a sign of a lack of courage. Not having the courage, the internal strength, to stand up and say what's right.

Lying comes from fear. Abraham lied in Egypt. His son did that a few years later, copying what he did. Aaron was afraid of the people. Remember he built the golden calf because he was afraid of them. Peter in the New Testament denied Christ three times. Why? He was afraid of what people would think if he told the truth. Remember that fear caused the people to not follow the Lord and not enter the Promised Land.

Joshua wasn't afraid. He told the people, "We can do it." He and Caleb had that valuable message. If you feel like you're facing an uphill battle, you need to know that God is the one who provides the internal courage to face the challenge, whatever it is. And I think God calls us to do hard things sometimes that seem impossible. Outward circumstances like illness or disabilities or broken relationships or financial hardship, the loss of a job. Those are the hard things. But then there's the internal battle that we wrestle with in the midst of those things where our faith is tested. The need we have to have personal integrity. Remaining faithful when no one is looking and during the sting of loneliness and separation. Standing alone when you're misunderstood. I think there are a lot of times in our lives when we need to be strong and courageous.

What does that look like? *Be strong and courageous*. It doesn't say be harsh and mean, it says be strong and courageous. And sometimes the strong and courageous thing to do is to be gentle and kind.

Where did Joshua learn courage? I think he learned it from his mentor, Moses. Deuteronomy 7:17-19 and 21 says this, *You may say to yourselves, "These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?" This is Moses talking. But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the Lord your God brought you out. The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God.* That's another great verse to memorize, isn't it?

Your God is a great and awesome God. I think we take those two principles and we put them together. "I will always be with you." God will never forsake us. And we put it together with this one: be strong and courageous. They go together as we're trying to serve the Lord. Strength and courage don't come by just sheer grit, they come with our knowledge that we're following the Lord and doing what He has for us. Just like Joshua and the nation of Israel, we find ourselves in challenging situations and so we want to look for ways that we could be strong and courageous in the midst of the challenges.

When the people failed, they did so because of the fear that they experienced. So Moses then describes, as he's recounting the story back in Deuteronomy 1, the failure of the people to enter into the Promised Land. He says this: *But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and said, "The Lord hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, 'The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.'"*

Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place." In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God.

The problem was they didn't have the courage enough to trust God in a difficult situation. They compromised and then failure was the result. In God's success principles, we put those two things together; that God will never leave us and forsake us and that we need to be strong and courageous.

Let's go to the next verse in Joshua 1:7. *Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.* So principle number three is one that we all need as we go into something new or we look for something new in our lives from the Lord. Number three: be obedient to God's commands. Do you see that in verse 7? *Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.* I hope you see the word 'all' there. *Be careful to obey **all** the law.*

I think sometimes we pick and choose based on our fancy at the moment. It's like going into a fruit stand. My wife and I drove Melissa and Peter back to New York City where they live. While they were there in New York City, we were leaving the city and we saw this huge fruit stand. I'm talking about lots of fruit (more than you'd find around our area) in New York City, in Brooklyn. So we decided we'd pull over and stop. We bought a lot of fruit for just a few dollars. It was amazing. Great prices too. Fruit I'd never seen before. For example, there were doughnut pears. They were shaped like doughnuts and they're pears. I'd never seen that before. All kinds of different fruits and vegetables at this stand.

I think we sometimes come to God and say, "Ah joy. I'd like some of that," and "Ooh peace. I need some of that," and "Love. I'd like some of that." "Patience? I'm not in the mood for that. Forgiveness? Oh that turns my stomach; I don't think I'll take that." So we do the picking and choosing like in a fruit stand of the commands that God has for us. Our task is to obey all of the commands.

It's very important for us to grab this truth and start serving the Lord with all of the commands. If you're a young person, I would suggest you can do so much for the Lord. When you start dedicating your whole heart to the Lord, in everything that you do, you do it right. If you're in a dating relationship, then do it right. Obey God. If you're in a business relationship, do it right. Just because somebody else does it wrong, don't worry about them. Do your part, do it right. All you can do is work on yourself. Other people may do the wrong thing, but you do the right thing. Don't excuse disobedience for the fact that other people are doing the wrong thing. Do the right thing. When you come to God, it's one hundred percent. "God, I give you everything in my life. I want to obey all of your commands."

I think some people view God as going into a gas station and saying, "I'll just take twenty dollars worth of God today, please." "I just need enough to ease my conscience today," or "I need enough to get over this little problem I'm experiencing right now."

That's not what he's talking about here. It's total commitment, giving ourselves completely to the Lord. Obeying every command. That's principle number three and it ties in very well to principle number four, which is in verse 8.

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Principle number four is be saturated in God's word. Look for ways to be saturated in God's word. What does that mean? Allow God to transform your mind with the power of His word.

I think there's a common desire that we all have to be successful. That's the word there. Be *successful* and *prosperous*. We all have that desire to be successful and prosperous, but I think we sometimes measure success based on a worldly standard and not a godly standard. Success by the world's standard means luxury or wealth, possessions, achievement, notoriety and fame, beauty and brains. If we measure ourselves by world's standards then we never quite know if we've found it.

God has a whole different way of measuring success. When we take that quiet time in the morning to allow God's word to affect our lives, it gives us perspective on the day's problems that we're going to have. When we take time in the morning to pray and allow God to give us insight into our day, then it just gives us the perspective that we need.

So he's talking about do not let this law leave your mouth; meditate on it day and night. Which translation is the best? I like the young boy who said, "The best translation I can find is my dad's translation. Putting it into practice. My dad serves the Lord and he puts it into practice all the time." That's the best translation we can have. That we're all serving the Lord and doing, obeying, what He's asked of us.

God's formula for success works and it starts with understanding the principles of God's word, applying them to our lives in very practical ways. God allows us to conquer the land, the Promised Land of our lives. For each one of us that looks a little bit different. We have challenges that we face, relationships that we're developing, work that we're involved in. But God wants us to experience the blessings of the Promised Land in the midst of all of that.

It comes by paying attention to these principles, recognizing that God is always with you. Be strong and courageous. Be obedient to God's commands and be saturated in God's word. It's total commitment. It's recognition that the essence of all things, really, is Jesus Christ. That He is the essence of life. When we put that together in our own hearts, then we're able to trust Him more significantly.

I want to show you a short video just to allow you to meditate on this idea. It's about two minutes long. I just want to conclude our time today by allowing you to watch this video and take a moment to think about your own relationship with the Lord; to think about what God has for you and about total commitment to Him in every area of your life.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you as weak people. Lord, I just want to humble ourselves before you and ask that you would touch us, encourage us, strengthen us. Give us the strength we need to live the life you've called us to live. Lord, we look around at life situations. They can be rather difficult and challenging, confusing, strained; stretching us to limits that are very difficult to manage or hold. And it's in those moments, Lord, we learned so much about you and the need to trust you and to value you and to embrace you in our lives. Father, I ask that you would prove yourself faithful, recognizing that we can trust you in everything that we do and you never leave us or forsake us. You're right there to be with us in ways that we can enjoy, in ways that can strengthen who we are. Lord, I ask that you would be honored in our hearts now. Some might not know what steps to take, but, Lord, give us the strength to take that first step in obedience to you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.