

# FOLLOW THE LEADER

## *JOSHUA - THE ADVENTURE AND VICTORY OF FAITH*

by Doug Goins

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Every so often, if you're an athletic coach, a teacher, or a leader in ministry, you come across a young person who shows great promise. A coach detects unusual coordination combined with a strong will, and they picture a future All-American, perhaps a future Olympic gold-medalist. So the work of training begins. A teacher spots a gifted student, and they see the promise of a valedictorian, a Phi Beta Kappa, a Ph.D., or, perhaps of even greater significance, somebody who just has a powerful hunger for truth.

Every so often as a pastor I spot a young person who has a great heart for spiritual ministry, who has leadership potential. I get really excited, and I have to hold myself back so as not to overwhelm them with my optimism. God deserves our best in serving him, and when I see one of those people, it kind of makes my juices flow. But I want them to hear God's call. I want to encourage them, not push them. I want them to respond to the Lord, not to me. I want them to fulfill the potential that he has placed within them---so I hope and pray that they will sense God's leading, respond in obedient submission, and be willing to grow into leadership.

I'm thankful, in all of that, that God is not an elitist. He doesn't single out certain outstanding individuals as special. He really does see promise in each one of us, and he is in the business of helping us discover the area of leadership to which he is calling us at home, school, in our neighborhoods, on our jobs, in our church.

Joshua is one of the most fascinating books of the Bible. On one level it relates the historical account of an ancient Hebrew leader and the people God called him to lead into the promised land. But on another level it's a personal story of promise, of the great expectations that God has for each one of us. God calls each of us to enter the land, to claim a life of adventure lived by faith, experiencing spiritual victory.

In the previous message we looked at Joshua 1:1-9, where God personally called Joshua to leadership. There God encouraged Joshua with irrevocable promises about his leadership and the future. God also encouraged him through the written word of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, that Moses had completed. Finally, God encouraged Joshua through a direct command that contained within it the confidence that Joshua would become everything that God wanted him to be.

Applying that message to us today, it is as if God takes on the qualities of a perceptive coach or teacher or pastor, and gets excited about what we will become if we use the gifts he has given us. The powerful, faithful Jehovah God is calling us into spiritual leadership, and at the same time he is promising to make us what he wants us to be. He is committed to us; it's an absolute certainty. In Joshua 1:9 God said in conclusion, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Now in 1:10-15 Joshua is going to turn and speak to the people. In 1:16-18, the people are going to respond to Joshua's leadership and speak their own words of encouragement back to their leader. Let's look at verses 10-11 as we hear a spiritual leader's encouraging command to the officers of the people:

**Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, "Pass through the camp, and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions; for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land which the LORD your God gives you to possess.'"**

The words "Then Joshua commanded" speak of Joshua's immediate response to God's command. Once he knows what God wants, he does it. Spiritual leadership is sensitive to what God wants, and it lives in

obedience to God. Joshua doesn't equivocate, nor does he procrastinate, saying, "Well, it's been forty years. What's another month or two?"

Joshua calls together the leaders of the nation to give them a command, not to ask their advice. This is significant. Moses had organized the leaders of the nation. Back in Deuteronomy 1:15 in his farewell address to the nation, Moses said to the people, "So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands, and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes." Moses organized the nation this way so that he could communicate quickly with the people through the officers. But here Joshua assembles the leaders to give them God's orders. There are times when spiritual leaders must consult with the people they lead, whether it's in the home arena, Christian ministry or service, or the life of the church, and build consensus. But this isn't one of those times. God has spoken, his will is very clear, and the nation must be ready to obey.

Remember, forty years before at Kadesh-Barnea in an event recorded in Numbers 13, the nation knew the will of God, but they refused to obey it. Why did they refuse? Because they made a choice to believe the report of the ten spies instead of believing God's command to enter the land and possess it, to obey by faith. If they had listened to Joshua and Caleb's minority report, they would have spared themselves those difficult years of wandering in the wilderness.

There is a place in Christian service for godly counsel. But a committee report is no substitute for the clear command of God. Recalling the elders' meetings I've sat in here at PBC over the past seventeen years, I remember how the elders have wrestled with complicated, difficult decisions. Ed Woodhall reminded me last week of the corporate desire always to find the mind of the Lord. And so often in the middle of all the deliberations, one man would stop us and say, "We need to hear from the Lord. We need to know his will for the church."

In verse 11 are powerful words of confident faith on Joshua's part. He tells the people to prepare food, for in three days they will have to cross the Jordan. I would have expected Joshua to say something like "Let's organize focus groups and discuss river crossings," or "Let's get the pontoon guys out and get the bridges built," or "Let's build boats to get across the river." That is because when he tells the people, "We're going to cross this river some time in the next three days," they are going to say, "There's no way!" This river in the spring run-off is a mile-wide raging torrent. It would look like the Mississippi River looks today. (The Jordan River is now a muddy, brown, boring trickle---not much to look at.) Joshua doesn't tell them how it's going to happen, or try to second-guess God and work things out on his own, because he knows that the God who opened the Red Sea can also open the Jordan River. He and Caleb were there; they walked through on dry land. They know the same God is leading the nation now who led the nation then.

It's interesting that even though Joshua trusts God for a miracle, he still talks about practicalities and logistics. He has to prepare the people for everyday necessities of life. In modern armies we have a quartermaster corps to see to it that the soldiers have food and other provisions, but here Israel doesn't have a quartermaster corps. For forty years each family has depended on the supernatural provision of manna every morning, and the manna is still falling. It's going to stop after Israel enters the land. Joshua 5:10-12 describes this change from depending on the Lord for provision to providing for themselves physically: "While the people of Israel were encamped in Gilgal they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho. And on the morrow after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased on the morrow, when they ate of the produce of the land; and the people of Israel had manna no more, but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."

What Joshua is telling the people now before they have crossed the river is that it is important for them to change their mindset, to plan for physical sustenance to keep up their strength, to start thinking about living off the land.

They are about to begin a seven-year series of battles for possession of their promised land. Again, notice in verse 11 Joshua's words of faith and encouragement: "...You are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land which the LORD God gives you to possess." Joshua said something similar forty years earlier when he came back from spying out the land with the report, "Yes, we can do it. Let's cross over." But

that generation of leaders wouldn't listen. Now that old generation is dead and a new generation is ready to believe God to conquer the land.

We've got to be careful that we not think stereotypically about older people and younger people, old generations and new generations. Often we see old generations as being risk-averse and young people as being risk-takers and adventurers. I know that as I get older, there is more danger that I'm going to become set in my ways. I could become at PBC, in the words of my dad, a "sanctified obstructionist," saying, "No, no we can't do that." But it doesn't have to be that way. The reality here is that Caleb and Joshua are the oldest men in the camp, probably in their eighties at this time. And yet they are enthusiastic about trusting God and entering the land. It's not a matter of age, but of faith.

Confident faith comes from meditating on the word of God. We saw in Joshua 1:8 what God said to Joshua about where strength, confidence, and success come from: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous [effective], and then you shall have good success." The apostle Paul states the same truth in Romans 10:17: "... faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

I am so thankful for all of the senior saints who are like Joshua and who have been a part of my life and ministry, encouraging me to trust the Lord, trust the Scriptures, and move forward in obedience to the Lord. One such man in my life most recently is Ray Miller. Ray had a full career in the army as a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs. He retired from the military as a NATO general. He spent fifteen years in retirement on the board of directors for Open Doors with Brother Andrew, and traveled all around the world smuggling Bibles in and out of countries and giving leadership in that organization. Now, in his middle-seventies, Ray is still active in correspondence, studying and teaching. Ray was instrumental in a recent invitation to our pastoral staff to go to Pakistan to minister. Being granted visas for that Islamic republic has been difficult. I asked Ray just a few weeks ago, "Shall we pursue this? Or is it more trouble than it's worth?" Ray said, "You've got to trust the Lord. You've got to keep walking through the doors." Here is an older saint telling the younger ones to trust the Lord and follow him. Spiritual leaders never stop providing spiritual encouragement.

In verses 12-15 Joshua will focus on the leadership of two and a half tribes in Israel. These verses are parenthetical. He turns from all the leaders of the people and speaks to a special group of people within the nation. There are three tribes represented in this section: Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe Manasseh. Moses granted a request that they made months earlier to stake their claim on the east side of the Jordan River, to not enter into the promised land in Canaan. Manasseh asked for all the land east of the Sea of Galilee to the north, in what was called Bashan. Gad asked for everything east of the Jordan River, in what was called Gilead. Reuben asked for the land of Moab, which was east of the Dead Sea in the south. Moses granted the requests. What Joshua does now in verses 12-15 is review briefly Moses' instructions and warnings to those two and a half tribes (see Numbers 21, 32; Deuteronomy 3):

**And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan; but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brethren and shall help them, until the LORD gives rest to your brethren as well as to you, and they also take possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them; then you shall return to the land of your possession, and shall possess it, the land which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise."**

There are two geographical areas contrasted in these verses. First there is the land of Canaan across the Jordan to the west, the promised land. Twice it is called the place that the Lord gives them and twice a place of rest. Remember how desperately Moses wanted to cross the Jordan and enter the land of Canaan, and wasn't allowed to do it because of sin in his life. Look again at chapter 1, verse 2: "...Therefore arise, go over this

Jordan, you and all this people [all twelve tribes], into the land which I am giving to them, to the people of Israel." God's desire is for them to enter into the land of Canaan.

The contrasting land is that to the east of the Jordan, the lands of Bashan and Gilead and Moab. Twice these are called "the land which Moses gave you"---not the land that God gave them. Historically, you'll find that it was a concession on Moses' part to allow the two and a half tribes to live outside the promised land. In Numbers 32 Moses saw the request from these two and a half tribes as sinful rebellion. He said that it would be discouraging to the rest of the tribes. But their idea was to participate by sending soldiers to fight along with the other tribes in the conquest and possession of the land. So Moses agreed with their request. It's clear in Numbers 32 that the two and a half tribes were driven by self-interest. They liked this area of Bashan and Gilead and Moab because it was fertile and lush, and they were already there. It says at one point that it was a wonderful place for cattle, with lots of grazing land. Apparently, their first concern was making a living and not entering into abundant spiritual life. They would rather have had large flocks and herds than live with their brothers and sisters in the inheritance that God gave them.

In contrast to the concern of the two and a half tribes is Joshua's concern. He cares about unity and about the common good of the nation. He urges these tribes to keep the promises they made because he wants to guard against any estrangement among the people. He is concerned that Israel be a united people both in conquering the land and in worshipping the Lord.

To jump ahead a bit, the two and a half tribes will keep their promise to help conquer the land, but they won't be whole-hearted in their participation. They will have 136,000 fighting men available for battle, and in verse 14 Joshua asks them to send all their fighting men to fight on the other side of the river. But only 40,000 men will actually cross the Jordan to fight in the promised land, while the rest of the soldiers will stay home to protect the women and children and flocks and the cities they have already captured earlier in these areas. When the spoils of war are divided up in Joshua 22, we'll see that the 40,000 soldiers take home enough spoils for the 96,000 soldiers who stayed behind to guard their families and flocks.

The choice of the two and a half tribes not to live in Canaan will continue to cause problems for Israel throughout her national history. These tribes will be far from the place of national worship. We're going to see in Joshua 22 that in erecting a special monument to remind their children that they are citizens of Israel, they almost cause a civil war in the nation. Throughout the period of the Judges they have an uneasy relationship with the tribes in Canaan. And the later history of the monarchy will demonstrate the consequences that result from their being cut off from the rest of Israel by the Jordan River, and from being exposed to their enemies through lack of natural boundaries. They will be the first tribes swept away in the Assyrian invasions of Israel.

For us today, Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe Manasseh represent many borderline believers---people who have a relationship with Christ, who get close to the full, joyful inheritance, who experience some spiritual victory in their lives, but who are determined to go back to the perceived comfort across the Jordan. The land to the east of the Jordan is really still the wilderness. It's a place of indulgence to people for whom the quality of material life is more important than life eternal.

I have lived in my own life as a borderline believer. In that period personal safety and security were paramount. I looked good religiously, even successful. I was willing to help my brothers and sisters, even serve the Lord for a time (usually a time of my own determination). I had high degrees of self-absorption and self-consciousness in my life. The issues of my needs and my rights were central. It was a period of great introspection for me.

That issue of introspection is addressed in the book of Judges. I told you these tribes will have an uneasy relationship with the rest later on. In Judges 4 and 5 Deborah, the great judge of Israel, calls all the tribes to war against Jabin, the Canaanite king, and General Sisera, with his nine hundred chariots of iron. But not all the tribes respond. There is a great victory song by Deborah and Barak at the end of the account. Listen to these words about the tribes east of the Jordan:

**"Among the clans of Reuben  
there were great searchings of heart.**

**Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,  
to hear the piping for the flocks?  
Among the clans of Reuben  
there were great searchings of heart.  
Gilead [Gad] stayed beyond the Jordan...."**

That phrase used twice, "searchings of heart," speaks of self-focus, self-examination, self-direction. That is what living in the wilderness is all about: functioning on our own, trusting our own resources, wandering around as Christians yet resisting Jesus' full and complete control of our lives, living in old comfort zones, controlled by old habit patterns, meandering through life without enjoying the fullness of what God has designed for us, being just Christian enough to be miserable, still living with anger and fear and bitterness, with the idolatry of materialism, with self-protectiveness as we rebel in some area of our life. But we don't have to live that way. In the words of Hebrews 12:1, we can throw off everything that hinders us, the sin that so easily entangles.

The officers of the people who have been listening to Joshua's command for preparation, and also to his aside to the two and a half tribes, respond enthusiastically in verses 16-18. Verse 16 gives the response primarily of the leaders of the other nine and a half tribes, because the response of these people is so whole-hearted, so unconditional, in contrast to the half-heartedness of those borderline tribes. There are four ways that the people of Israel encourage Joshua, their leader. He is trying to follow the Lord, and they are willing to follow the Lord through him. The first thing they do in verses 16-17 is assure Joshua of their complete obedience:

**And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you...."**

These officers have no personal agenda. They ask for no concessions to benefit them personally. They trust God, speaking through Joshua. They know the commands aren't Joshua's, but the Lord's. They know that "wherever" they are to go is God's territory, Canaan, and that he will lead them into battle.

Imagine what a powerful force we in our own church could be if we had the same confidence in following our risen Lord Jesus. The men of Promise Keepers, who met this weekend in our area, were given that sort of wonderful challenge in their days together. But too often we're like the three men who talk with Jesus in Luke 9:57-62. They all talk about following him, but each of them puts something personal ahead of that:

**"And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' And He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Permit me first to go and bury my father.' But He said to him, 'Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'"**

In a George MacDonald novel, *The Marquis of Lossie*, one of the characters says, "I find the doing of the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about His plan!" That is the attitude Joshua's officers display. They are not so attached to Moses that they can't submit to Joshua's spiritual leadership. God appointed both Moses and Joshua, and to disobey the servant is to disobey the ultimate Master. Joshua doesn't have to explain or defend his orders. He simply gives them, and the men obey.

I was struck that this same attitude of submission is shown in two of the prayer requests in today's bulletin: "Pray that I can leave a tough work situation soon for a better job; pray that God will be glorified in this whole process." "Lord, give us a clear, strong call into fields already ripe for harvest." Both of those people are saying, "Lord, wherever you lead we'll follow"---in job searches or in penetrating the community with ministry.

The people promise submission to Joshua, and that is tremendously encouraging to a leader. The second way they encourage Joshua in verse 17 is by praying for him:

**...Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses!**

The best thing we can do for people who lead us is to pray for them every single day, and ask God to be with them in their responsibilities of leadership. Joshua spent eighty-five years being prepared for this responsibility by the Lord. He is fully trained, with vast experience, but that is no guarantee of success. None of us can succeed to the glory of God in the spiritual leadership God calls us to at home, in our neighborhoods, at school, in the workplace, in our communities, or in our church, apart from prayer. In the writings of Corrie Ten Boom is this great question: "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?" It especially applies to those in places of leadership. We're going to see in chapters 7 and 9 of Joshua that when Joshua doesn't stop to ask God's direction, he fails miserably, and so will we.

The third way the people encourage Joshua in the first part of verse 18 is take Joshua's leadership and their responsibilities with life-and-death seriousness. Verse 18:

**Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death.**

In Joshua 7 we will find a man named Achan who doesn't take God's orders through Joshua seriously, and he and his entire family are executed as a consequence. Remember the very pointed question that Jesus asked: "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46.) If we as God's people today saw obedience to Christ as a matter of life and death, if we lived our Christianity with intensity, it would make a huge difference in our ministry to a lost world.

There would be no credibility issue anymore in terms of our "walking our talk." But I think too often we obey the Lord's loving commands if we feel like it, if it's convenient, and if we can get something out of it. If he had had soldiers like that, Joshua would never have conquered the promised land. And the affirmation here is, "No, we won't be like that. It's a matter of life and death for us."

The last line of verse 18 shows the fourth way they encourage their leader. They remind him of the word of God that he has heard before:

**Only be strong and of good courage.**

Joshua first heard these words when Moses sent him into Canaan with the other men to spy out the land. It was one of the words of encouragement that Moses spoke to all the spies. Moses repeated the words to Joshua forty years later when he installed him as his successor. Both times these words were written down in the book of the law that Moses wrote. And Joshua was commanded to read that book, to meditate on it day and night (see 1:8). Four times in these eighteen verses of chapter one we have found these words. Three times God says them to Joshua, and now the people turn around and say them to their leader.

If we are to conquer enemies, our own struggles with fleshly rebellion and sin, our own resistance to what God wants, the enemies out there that oppose us, the world system, and satanic evil itself; and if we're going to claim our inheritance in Christ, we must have courage and strength. Ephesians 6:10-11, 17-18 tells us the source of that kind of courage and strength: "...Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil...And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...." We're called to warfare, but not in our own strength, not based on our own courage, and not in isolation. We live in community, so we are to pray for one another and with one another, to encourage one another.

I was privileged to be raised by parents who followed the Lord and who still follow the Lord with enthusiastic consistency. In our society this is increasingly rare because of the tragic disintegration of family life, which is the fabric of our society. My folks are consistent in their obedience to who God is and what God wants from

them. They are consistent in prayer. They still live their Christian life with intensity, zeal, and enthusiasm. My folks are still confident of the Scriptures. In their middle seventies, they're both giving spiritual leadership in all kinds of arenas including the lives of all of their children and grandchildren. Their home is still a place of hospitality and spiritual life. They are active in their neighborhood. They are both involved in hospital ministry, and they are very active in their church. My folks still lead people to Christ. They give away their financial resources with generosity, unconditionally. My parents both still teach the Bible in all kinds of settings. My folks have never retired from the call to follow their leader.

We are called to follow our leader, in the words of that great verse in Hebrews 12, "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...." That is the call of this passage---to trust the God who calls, who speaks, who reveals himself, who says, "Follow me."

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