

Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker

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Study Through the Bible

Joshua

Why read this book?

Have you ever wished for a second chance? Perhaps you squandered a rare opportunity. Maybe you tried something, but your halfhearted attempt failed. Or perhaps you wasted a prime time of life, a precious gift or a valued friendship. The book of Joshua reminds us that God often offers us a second chance. Though the Israelites failed to enter the promised land the first time, and though they wasted 40 years for their failure, God gave them another chance. Having learned their lesson, the results were different the second time around. Their story is inspiring for us all.

Who wrote this book?

Perhaps Joshua and/or the priests Eleazar and Phinehas.

When was it written?

If Joshua wrote it, probably about 1390 B.C.

To whom was it written and why?

To the Israelites, to continue the history of their nation and reassure them that they owed their existence to God.

What to look for in Joshua:

Ancient Biblical history: (1) knowledge about God—about his purpose, his words and how he works in human lives, (2) a deeper appreciation for the grace and mercy of God when we see the requirements the Old Testament law placed on people, (3) encouragement in our own faith when we hear stories about the faith of God's people and their struggles in challenging times, and (4) a spiritual connection to God's people which helps us to identify with them as part of God's family.

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

Move Forward in Faith

God has power in your circumstances.

The Hebrew nation had come to the edge of the land of promise, a land given to them by God. But they retreated. They withdrew their forces. They evacuated. And for 40 years they wandered in the desert, defeated in their minds by an enemy that never fired a single shot or mounted a campaign against them.

Now 40 years later, the Hebrew nation and their leader, Joshua, were back on the brink of the Promised Land. Ready for retirement, no doubt Joshua was apprehensive about taking on a major military campaign against a formidable foe.

This study will challenge you to put your faith into action, to live in the present rather than the past, and to recognize God and his power in your circumstances.

Scripture:

Joshua 1:1-7, 9, 18

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

When any circumstance challenges us, we can ignore it and hope it goes away, put band-aids on it, or conquer it.

The task before Joshua was impossible. Forty years earlier, he had been a covert operator, spying out the land of Canaan. Strong and warlike people defended the land. Their very appearance had caused the 10 other spies sent by Moses to cringe with fear. They felt as small as grasshoppers.

The Hebrews were outmanned and outnumbered by a daunting opposition. Living off the desert for 40 years, they were in no condition to assemble a major military campaign. Taking the land looked as improbable as the island nation of Britain winning against the mighty onslaught of the German juggernaut in World War 2. If the truth were known, the rank and file Hebrew would rather evacuate than mount a charge.

But, wars are not won by evacuations.

Did Joshua feel that way, too? Undoubtedly the commanding skills of this octogenarian were fading. He had not led a military assault in more than 40 years. But, like all great leaders, Joshua knew that timing was of the essence—not his timing, but God's timing. And that day of God's perfect timing had arrived. Joshua, fearful and timid but also older and wiser, would do what God wanted the Israelites to have done 40 years earlier—take the land.

This would be the Hebrew nation's finest hour.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Describe a time in your life when you were afraid of your circumstances.
- [Q] What helped you get through that rough time?
- [Q] When facing a challenge, how do you know when you're acting in faith and when you're acting foolishly?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Live in the present, not in the past.

Read Joshua 1:1–2.

Moses' presence loomed large and powerful. Living in that shadow was intimidating. As Joshua compared himself to Moses, he knew he did not measure up. No doubt, Joshua felt inferior. He needed to hear God say, "Joshua, Moses my servant is dead! For years, I've been preparing you



for this moment. I saw great promise in you a long time ago. Quit comparing yourself. Live in the present, not in the past.”

- [Q] When have you seen someone’s past, positive or negative, hinder his or her present?
- [Q] To win a battle against enemies without often requires that we first win a battle within. Tell about a time you saw or experienced that.

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God can give us power to overcome our fears.*

Activity: *Display common items (a rubber band, a piece of paper, leftover fabric, a pencil, a ball, a book, a Kleenex, note cards). Assemble as many items as persons in your group. Ask each person to pick up one item and express how it represents what they would do if they weren’t afraid. For example, the note card might represent a letter to an estranged friend. The ball might represent building a relationship with a child. The Kleenex might symbolize pursuing counseling.*

Teaching point two: Affirm the presence of God in your circumstances.

Read Joshua 1:3–5. Joshua trembled at the thought of leading a military campaign against a powerful foe. But God reminded Joshua that as he let go of the past to battle the Canaanites, he would not fight alone. God said, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Just as God had been with Moses, he would be with Joshua.

So God will also be with us. In the darkest night, he is there. In the severest battle, he is present. In the most difficult task, he will not abandon us.

By his very nature, God will not desert his people when he gives them an order, a task, or a leading. Even if the situation seems impossible, God’s presence will be strongly apparent.

God is the great equalizer. His presence makes the difference in helping people accomplish impossible tasks. A shepherd boy named David faced and defeated the giant hero of the Philistines because God was with him. Daniel was safe among ferocious lions because God was with him. Three young Hebrew captives in Babylon survived the fiery furnace of the king because God walked through the fire with them. A handful of uneducated Christ-followers communicated the good news of Jesus in the hostile city of Jerusalem and ultimately turned it and the world upside down. How could they fight such battles of a lifetime? God was with them.

- [Q] Describe how you would react if you were in Joshua’s shoes.
- [Q] Do you view God as your ally or your enemy? How does it feel to know he is present and watching?



[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) God expects more of me than I can handle.
- 2) I can't wait to find out what God has planned next for me.
- 3) I am more prepared today than I was in the past for whatever comes my way.
- 4) I am fearful of attempting things beyond my ability.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? What is at stake in each position?

[Q] When has knowing God is present changed the way you view your circumstances?

Teaching point three: Rely on God's power to fulfill his commands.

Joshua was in alliance with the ultimate superpower, God, who said, "No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life."

Fear keeps us from obeying God's order. The promise of God's power gets us started and keeps us going. It has been said that courage is not the absence of fear but the ability to walk on in spite of fear. God's power enables us to get started and keep going.

We need to understand that our strength comes from God, who never faints or grows weary. Throughout Scripture we are commanded, as Joshua was, "Be strong and courageous." That is an impossible command to obey unless God imparts his strength to us. But God has tipped the scales in favor of us weak and timid people. We can try all we want, but we have not tapped all the strength that is available to us until we draw upon the Lord—the source of all strength.

Read Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18.

[Q] What is the opposite of being strong and courageous (v. 9)?

[Q] What difference did it make that God said he would be with Joshua wherever he went? What difference does it make to you?

[Q] God tells Joshua clearly that he wants him to lead his people (v. 6). How would this help Joshua find strength?

[Q] In what ways does knowing you are in God's will give you courage? How do you know you are in God's will?

[Q] God mentions obedience to the law in the same breath as his admonition to be strong and courageous. Why do you think that is?

Teaching point four: Moving forward in faith requires action.

With the past dealt with and with a clear understanding of the promises of God's power, the present is the time to act. In a manner of speaking, there is no past, there is no future; all we have is the present. What will we do in the here and now?



Procrastination is the deathblow to moving forward. “I’ll do it later after I get organized.” “I have been rejected so many times I can’t try again.” “If I can’t do it perfectly, I won’t even start.” “I don’t want to start that now because I don’t need the extra work.” Those are all statements of procrastinators, who never accomplish their tasks because they never get started.

God said, “I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses” (Joshua 1:2–3). Notice, the promise did not apply to sitters and waiters—only to people on the move. Unless Joshua and the Hebrews moved forward, they would never accomplish the task that awaited them. Insecure as he must have felt, Joshua had to get going for the impossibility of conquering Canaan to become a reality.

Winston Churchill said, “Wars are not won by evacuations!” Churches don’t make a difference by being content with the status quo. We too must move forward. To move forward we must step out of our comfort zone even though our minds and emotions may be urging us to hold back. Here’s where faith comes in. Faith is more than belief. It is more than mental assent. Faith is action. It’s getting in the game rather than watching from the sidelines.

Looking again at Joshua 1:2–5, discuss the following:

- [Q]** What are the specific promises that God gave Joshua? What made these promises so incredible? Why would it have been difficult for Joshua to believe these things could happen?
- [Q]** Talk about at least one specific promise God has made to you in the Bible. What makes that promise so incredible? What makes it hard for you to believe that promise?
- [Q]** Why did Joshua have to be moving forward to see God act? How is that also true for us? What are some ways we become so paralyzed in our Christian life that we cannot move forward? How can we overcome this paralysis?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Inadequate as Joshua felt, he took action. In spite of the dangers ahead, he was a faith walker. He moved forward and received the blessings that awaited him. A poem by Patrick Overton says it best:

When you walk to the edge of all the light you have
And take that step into the darkness of the unknown
You must believe that one of two things will happen:
Either there will be something solid for you to stand on
Or God will teach you how to fly.

As the story of Joshua unfolds, we discover that Joshua and the Hebrews took that step forward. They were faith walkers. It was their finest hour.

- [Q]** Give examples of ways your church needs to take action: in ministry, stewardship, outreach, building, and so on.



- [Q] List opportunities we have for personal action, such as: striving for a better marriage, recommitting to spiritual growth, healing broken relationships.
- [Q] Commitment to move ahead in our Christian life takes time and effort. What are you willing to give up to obey God and act on the promises he has given you?
- [Q] In what ways must your view of God change to find the strength and courage you need?

—Study by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Move Forward in Faith

God has power in your circumstances.

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

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PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Live in the present, not in the past.

Teaching point two: Affirm the presence of God in your circumstances.

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) God expects more of me than I can handle.
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- 4) I am fearful of attempting things beyond my ability.

Teaching point three: Rely on God's power to fulfill his commands.

Teaching point four: Moving forward in faith requires action.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Inadequate as Joshua felt, he took action. In spite of the dangers ahead, he was a faith walker. He moved forward and received the blessings that awaited him. A poem by Patrick Overton says it best:

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Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

How Flawed Rahab Saved a Nation

God delights in using the weak to accomplish his purposes.

When American novelist William Faulkner was asked about the literary people he associated with, Faulkner shrugged his shoulders and said he didn't know any literary people. "The people I know are other farmers and horse people and hunters, and we talk about horses and dogs and guns and what to do about this hay crop or this cotton crop, not about literature," he said.

Likewise, God seems most interested in people who are unpretentious and have known desperation and defeat. They are flawed and wounded and appear to have nowhere to turn. They pray desperate prayers. They hold onto shattered dreams. They are trapped by wrong choices. They are estranged from society, often rejected. They are like Rahab.

This study demonstrates that God delights in using the weak to accomplish his purposes.

Scripture:

Joshua 2

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the "Participant's Guide" included at the end of this study.

Everyone loves an underdog. It's a delight when the unexpected happens and the one least likely to shine does. God turns our sensibilities topsy-turvy when he chooses to use Rahab.

Joshua needed some military intelligence about Jericho before leading the Hebrews into the Promised Land. So he sent two young men disguised as foreign travelers to the ancient fortress. The two spies found refuge in the house of a prostitute, who was also an innkeeper.

Rahab was the talk of the town, but nobody talked to her. Every square inch of her body was lovely, but she was unloved. Women despised Rahab and shunned her. Men leered at her, joked about, and used her. It was the price she paid for being the town whore.

Rahab's house backed up to the outside wall of the city, which was convenient for men to shimmy down for a quick escape. Living on the fringe of society, Rahab provided a safe place for the two spies. She was the last person one would expect God to use in a significant way. Yet God chose to use her.

God loves to turn things upside-down. He selects the most unexpected people to work with. He specializes in using the rejects of society, the broken and flawed, the down and out. Consider how God used Abraham, a liar; Moses, a murderer; David, an adulterer; Peter, the denier; Saul, a killer. The list goes on and on. God works through the most ordinary and unlikely people who are on the edge of social respectability.

Knowing that's how God works is reassuring. It gives us hope. It gives us possibility.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What do you feel are some of your limitations that would prevent God from using you?
- [Q] Why would God choose to use flawed people?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God delights in using the weak to accomplish his purposes.

Read Joshua 2:1–7. There is a wonder about Rahab, about me, and about you. Our identity is not found in our fallen and flawed status. Our past is not our destiny. We may be unlovely, but we are not unloved. What did God know about Rahab, and you and me, for that matter? He knows that even though we are flawed and fallen, we are usable and worthwhile in his kingdom work. We may be unlovely to society, but God loves us. We are precious to him.

Rahab is just one in a long line of folks who allowed God to use them. Scripture has quite a gallery of ordinary people who made themselves available to God. Heaven may even have a



shrine to honor God's uncommon use of common, unspectacular people. It's a place you won't want to miss. Stroll through that place and see Rahab offering her home as a refuge to strangers and her rope as an escape. View the people who helped Paul get in a bucket to flee from would-be assassins. See David in Goliath's shadow warming up his sling before launching the fatal stone. Take a gander at Samson picking up a jawbone to erase a whole group of discontents. Feel the staff that Moses used to split the sea and smite the rock. Sniff the ointment that Mary used to soothe Jesus' skin. Touch the parchment that Paul used to write his letters.

Quite a fraternity, isn't it?

God has always used ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary, the common to perform the uncommon, the flawed to fulfill the phenomenal.

- [Q] Why do you think God included the story of Rahab in this account of the conquering of Canaan? What is the point of her story? What difference does it make to you that God used Rahab?
- [Q] What did Rahab do that brought her God's favor? What risk did Rahab take to protect the spies? Why do you think she took the men into her house?

Teaching point two: God works today just as he did in the past.

Read Joshua 2:8–13. In the book of Joshua, chapter two reads like a sidebar. As a chapter, the account of Rahab is not needed to tell the story of the conquest of Canaan. If you read chapter one, then skipped chapter two and picked up with chapter three, you wouldn't miss the progression of the main story. So why is chapter two included? What is the purpose of Joshua 2 and the story of Rahab, the prostitute? The purpose of Rahab's story is not to tell us simply what God did; it's to teach us what God does.

- [Q] What statement of faith does Rahab make in verses 9–11? Why is this statement so remarkable? What about it would be pleasing to God?
- [Q] What one thing does God seem to be looking for in Rahab? What do you think he looks for in you?
- [Q] According to verses 12–13, Rahab believed so completely that the Lord was God that she was willing to put her family on the line. What do you need to trust him with?

Teaching point three: God wants to use you.

If God can use Rahab, he can use you and me. Look closely, and you will see how God has worked to give you a new life and a lingering legacy.

Read Joshua 2:14–24.

- [Q] How did Rahab's actions affect Israel's future? Why was what she said and did so important to Joshua and his warriors?



- [Q]** In what ways has God tapped you for service? When has God looked past your flaws because he loved you and chose to use you as a part of his unfolding plan? Share at least one instance with the group.
- [Q]** Make a list of your current flaws (for your eyes only, no one else will see this). Make a note after each flaw about how God might use it for his purposes.

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To recognize that God wants to use even our flaws.*

Activity: *Put the following situations on individual pieces of paper, fold, and put in a hat. Ask two to four people to pick a piece of paper, read it aloud, and act out for the rest of the group how God might use the situation for good. The group must guess what he or she is demonstrating.*

- *Levi became hooked on alcohol when he was in college. He has finally admitted he has a problem and is going to AA.*
- *Tamar found out that she is pregnant. She is single, a student, and has only been a Christian for a few weeks.*
- *Rory is painfully shy. She has trouble talking in a group and is happiest when with one person at a time.*
- *Alfred was in a fire that burned a third of his body. He is now in good health but has noticeable scars on his face, arms, and legs.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The story of Rahab does not end at Joshua 2. Notice the following:

1. Rahab survived the battle of Jericho and became a member of the Israelite community. She packed up and moved on with the people of God. She later married a Jewish man named Salmon and raised a family of her own, gaining respect in the community.
2. The first chapter of Matthew chronicles the ancestors of Jesus Christ. Guess who's on that list? Rahab. Her descendants became the kings of Israel and Judah. The Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, was of her lineage.
3. Jewish tradition holds that Rahab was one of the four most beautiful women who ever lived. She's renowned as a hero of Israel even today. The book of Hebrews lists men and women set apart for their great faith. Look who shows up: "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient" (Hebrews 11:31).

- [Q]** You do not know the end of your own story. There will be things you understand years from now that don't make sense at this time. Some things will only be clear when we reach heaven. What details of your life do you need to trust God with?



- [Q] Think of someone you know who is feeling useless or discouraged. Write a letter of encouragement to that person using the concepts you've learned in this study.
- [Q] What do you think is the most important quality you have that God might choose to use?

—Study by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 2

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

How Flawed Rahab Saved a Nation

God delights in using the weak to accomplish his purposes.

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Scripture:
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Based on:
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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

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God loves to turn things upside-down. He selects the most unexpected people to work with. He specializes in using the rejects of society, the broken and flawed, the down and out. Consider how God used Abraham, a liar; Moses, a murderer; David, an adulterer; Peter, the denier; Saul, a killer. The list goes on and on. God works through the most ordinary and unlikely people who are on the edge of social respectability.

Knowing that's how God works is reassuring. It gives us hope. It gives us possibility.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God delights in using the weak to accomplish his purposes.

Teaching point two: God works today just as he did in the past.

Teaching point three: God wants to use you.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The story of Rahab does not end at Joshua 2. Notice the following:

1. Rahab survived the battle of Jericho and became a member of the Israelite community.
2. Matthew 1 chronicles the ancestors of Jesus Christ. Rahab is on that list.
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Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 3

LEADER'S GUIDE

Crossing Jordan

God honors radical, risk-taking faith.

God loves it when we have all-out, daring faith in him. Nowhere was this more evident than when Joshua was preparing to lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land. One big obstacle stood in their way: the Jordan River. This border to the Promised Land represented the great defining boundary that separated the Hebrews' past from their future, from God's promise to its fulfillment. The Jordan presented a challenge as well as a promise. The crossing required a new faith experience in order for them to occupy the land God had waiting for them.

This study encourages us to wait on God, consecrate ourselves to him, and step out in faith.

Scripture:

Verse 3

Based on:

Based on

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the "Participant's Guide" included at the end of this study.

The following letter was found in a baking powder can wired to the handle of an old pump that offered the only hope of drinking water on a very long and seldom-used trail across the Amargosa Desert:

"This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer into it and it ought to last five years. But the washer dries out and the pump has got to be primed. Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and cork end up. There's enough water in it to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. Pour about one fourth and let her soak to wet the leather. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You'll git water. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you git watered up, fill the bottle and put it back like you found it for the next feller."

—Desert Pete

"P.S. Don't go drinking up the water first. Prime the pump with it and you'll get all you can hold."

If you were a lonely traveler shuffling down that parched desert trail with your canteen bone dry, would you trust Desert Pete? For all you know he is a lunatic. What if it's a mad hoax? There are no guarantees that what he claims is true. And what would motivate you to prime the pump with the water in the bottle, perhaps the only water available? But you understand the fact that old wells have to be primed. It's a gamble. A risk. An adventure. What do you do?

The lonely traveler had to prime the pump before all the water flowed. This principle manifests itself in everyday life. There are battles before victory. There are struggles before celebration. There are steps before arrivals. There is practice before perfection. There is preparation before completion. There is matriculation before graduation.

Over and over in Scripture this pattern is repeated: The Israelites had to march to the Red Sea before God parted it. Namaan had to wash seven times in the water before God cured him of leprosy. Gideon had to reduce his army from 32,000 down to 300 before God would deliver them from the Midianites. The loaves and fishes were given up before Jesus multiplied them.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What would you have done if you came across Desert Pete's instructions?
- [Q] Can you think of a similar modern-day example—in your life or someone else's?
- [Q] Why is it so hard to act on things that require faith?



Optional Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that waiting on God is worth the trouble.*

Activity: *Ask four different group members to pretend that they've just come across Desert Pete's note. Have each of them role-play one of the following. Stop after each one and discuss some possible spiritual parallels.*

- *Doesn't even take time to read the note, just tries to pump water but nothing comes out since the pump has not been primed.*
- *Reads the note but doesn't believe it. Decides to forge ahead without water.*
- *Decides to drink the bottle rather than priming the pump.*
- *Primes the pump just as Pete suggested.*

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Often we have to wait before moving ahead with God.

Read Joshua 3:1–4. Flowing north to south, the Jordan River is about 25 percent mud. It stretches over 200 miles from Mount Hermon to the Dead Sea, furiously plummeting from several hundred feet above sea level to approximately 1300 feet below sea level. Normally the Jordan is not difficult to cross. But when Joshua led the children of Israel to the Jordan, it was spring. The snows had melted on Mount Hermon. The normally dry wadies that flowed into the Jordan were raging currents inundating the main river. No longer mild and tame, the Jordan was a tempestuous, raging river at flood stage. During the dry season at its widest point, the Jordan was 100 feet wide, now it was over a mile wide. The Israelites were at an impasse.

Often, we have to wait before moving ahead with God. The children of Israel did. They had to wait three days after they were at the banks of the Jordan, ready to cross (see vs.2). For forty years they had waited, while an entire generation died. The promise had been deferred because of the unbelief of the elders. And now they would wait again with the destination in sight. They were not happy campers.

No one likes to wait. Waiting is not a strong suit for most of us. We are not patient people. We tend to be horn-honking, microwaving, Fed-Ex mailing, fast-food eating, express-lane shopping people. Yet sometimes God says wait.

Waiting is the hardest part of trusting. We live by the adage: Don't just stand there, do something. While God often says to us: Don't just do something, stand there.

Too often we want God's resources, but we do not want his timing. We forget that the work God is doing in us while we wait is as important as whatever we are waiting for. Waiting means that we give God the benefit of the doubt that he knows what he is doing.

Waiting reminds us that we are not in charge. Waiting humbles us in ways we need to be humbled.



When we get to the crossing moments of life we are not just waiting around, we are waiting for God. While you are waiting, remember that though you hear nothing, God is speaking. Though you see nothing, God is working.

- [Q] How does waiting on God display our trust in him?
- [Q] What does waiting on God look like?
- [Q] How has God used waiting in your life? How would your experience have been different if you had not waited?

Teaching point two: We must consecrate today before receiving the blessings of tomorrow.

Read Joshua 3:5. Then and now God calls his people to holiness, purity, and separation. For the Israelites on the edge of the Jordan, this meant washing themselves with water and practicing the ceremonial rites that would make them clean. They were to flush their minds of the filth and dirt that had accumulated over the years. They were to approach God with pure hearts, clean hands and feet, and blameless minds. They were about to enter the Holy Land—God's country. People took off their shoes. They fell prostrate in humility. When God said "consecrate yourselves," it was his way of saying only holy people would occupy a holy land.

The need for holiness, purity, and separation comes before the blessings of tomorrow, not the other way around. We often believe that if God will bless, then we'll get our lives right. God says that holiness precedes honor, cleanliness before usefulness, penance before power.

The promise that God would work miraculously tomorrow was contingent on the people's willingness to consecrate themselves today.

- [Q] According to the dictionary, consecration means "sanctification of something by setting it apart as dedicated to God" or "a solemn commitment of your life or your time to some cherished purpose." Using these definitions, how can we consecrate our lives?
- [Q] Which of the following sound like a valid way to consecrate your life? You may choose more than one, but you must explain why you are choosing each one.
 - 1) I will spend at least an hour in prayer each day.
 - 2) I will give up secular entertainment for the rest of my life.
 - 3) I will ask Christ to daily live his life through me.
 - 4) I will make sure that I'm doing at least one unselfish act daily.

What could be possible abuses in some of these choices? What would our motive have to do with it? How could even our best intentions become warped?

- [Q] How do we become set-apart and different from the rest of the world without becoming unbalanced?



Teaching point three: We have to step out in faith to see God act.

Read Joshua 3:6–17. Inevitably, we have to step first in faith before we see God act. Before God would part the waters of the Jordan, the Hebrews had to take a step of faith (see vs.14). God promised that the current of the Jordan would be dammed up but first the people had to step in the water. God was ready, willing, and able to perform an amazing miracle, but the people had to march forward. They had to get their feet wet before God would act.

Isn't that just like God? He wants to do some amazing things tomorrow but before he does—we have to trust today. We are required to demonstrate our faith. Kierkegaard wrote, “Without risk there is no faith.” For faith to be faith, we venture out beyond our own abilities and resources. We take the step before God acts.

Often God provides no solution to our problems until we trust him and move ahead. While he wants to supernaturally intervene in the difficulties and challenges of our everyday lives, we first must demonstrate faith by walking forward on the path of obedience. Compared to God's part, our part is miniscule but necessary. We don't have to do much, but we do have to do something.

- [Q] Why did stepping into the Jordan take faith? Name more than one reason.
- [Q] Why does our faith matter to God? Why doesn't he choose to act in spite of our faith? Does he ever act to boost our faith?
- [Q] Vs. 9 says, “Come...listen to the words of the LORD your God.” Why is listening to his word vital to taking a step of faith?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Waiting, consecration, and faith play out in our lives in the following manner:

When we risk giving generously, we discover that we really can trust God to take care of us. When we risk asking forgiveness of another person, we discover that God really will honor our confession. When we risk using our spiritual gifts, we know the joy of being used by God. When we risk making a phone call to encourage or show concern, we know the satisfaction of touching another human being at their point of need.

When the people marched, the river stopped flowing. When Namaan dipped, his leprosy departed. When Gideon reduced the size of his army, the battle was won. When the lunch was shared, thousands were fed.

The Hebrew children had to wait, to consecrate, and get their feet wet before God showed up.

So do we.

- [Q] For what do you need to be patient and wait for God?



- [Q] Write down at least one thing that needs to change in your life in order for God to use you. (This is between you and God, not to share with the group.)
- [Q] List some ways you need to get your feet wet. What are some things that God is nudging you to do that you have not acted on?

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Crossing Jordan

God honors radical, risk-taking faith.

God loves it when we have all-out, daring faith in him. Nowhere was this more evident than when Joshua was preparing to lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land. One big obstacle stood in their way: the Jordan River. This border to the Promised Land represented the great defining boundary that separated the Hebrews' past from their future, from God's promise to its fulfillment. The Jordan presented a challenge as well as a promise. The crossing required a new faith experience in order for them to occupy the land God had waiting for them.

This study encourages us to wait on God, consecrate ourselves to him, and step out in faith.

Scripture:
Verse 3

Based on:
Based on

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

There are battles before victory. There are struggles before celebration. There are steps before arrivals. There is practice before perfection. There is preparation before completion. There is matriculation before graduation.

Over and over in Scripture this pattern is repeated: The Israelites had to march to the Red Sea before God parted it. Namaan had to wash seven times in the water before God cured him of leprosy. Gideon had to reduce his army from 32,000 down to 300 before God would deliver them from the Midianites. The loaves and fishes were given up before Jesus multiplied them.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Often we have to wait before moving ahead with God.

Teaching point two: We must consecrate today before receiving the blessings of tomorrow.

[Q] Which of the following sound like a valid way to consecrate your life? You may choose more than one, but you must explain why you are choosing each one.

- 1) I will spend at least an hour in prayer each day.
- 2) I will give up secular entertainment for the rest of my life.
- 3) I will ask Christ to daily live his life through me.
- 4) I will make sure that I'm doing at least one unselfish act daily.

Teaching point three: We have to step out in faith to see God act.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

When we risk giving generously, we discover that we really can trust God to take care of us. When we risk asking forgiveness of another person, we discover that God really will honor our confession. When we risk using our spiritual gifts, we know the joy of being used by God. When we risk making a phone call to encourage or show concern, we know the satisfaction of touching another human being at their point of need.

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 4

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Mark of Distinctiveness

God calls his people to holiness.

God has always desired that his people be set apart—that there be a distinguishing mark upon them, that they be different. When the Hebrews crossed the Jordan to occupy the Promised Land, God marked them through an act called circumcision. Circumcision was an outward sign of inward obedience. It was a physical act that marked their identity as the people of God.

In like manner, God calls his people to holiness today. This study will demonstrate that a holy person is not an odd person, but a distinct person, who reflects God to those around them.

Scripture:
Joshua 5:1–9

Based on:
"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1**Identify the Current Issue**

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the "Participant's Guide" included at the end of this study.

C.E. Montague's novel, *Rough Justice*, describes Bron, a little boy who went to church for the first time with his governess. Bron watches the preacher climb into the high pulpit and hears him tell some terrible news about a brave and kind man who was nailed to a cross, terribly hurt, a long time ago, and who still feels dreadful pain even now, because there was something not done that he wants them all to do.

Little Bron thinks that the preacher is telling the story because a lot of people are there, and they will do something about it. Bron sits impatiently on the edge of the pew. He can hardly wait to see what the first move will be in righting this injustice. But he sits quietly and decides that after the service someone will do something about it. Little Bron begins to weep, but nobody else seems at all upset. The service ends, and the people walk away as if they had not heard such terrible news, as if nothing remarkable had happened.

As Bron leaves the church, he is trembling. His governess says, "Bron, don't take it to heart—someone will think you are different."

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What about Bron's behavior bothered his governess?
- [Q] The dictionary says that different means "distinct, separate, not the same, out of the ordinary, unusual." According to that definition, should God-followers be different? How should we be distinct? Separate? Not the same? Out of the ordinary? Unusual?

PART 2**Discover the Eternal Principles****Teaching point one: God wants his people to be set apart.**

Read Joshua 5:1–9. God wanted the Hebrews to have a distinguishing mark, something that would make them different, when they crossed the Jordan to occupy the Promised Land. God marked them through an act called circumcision, an outward sign of inward obedience. It was a physical act wrought with spiritual meaning. It marked their identity as the people of God. It revealed the covenant relationship that God had with his people. Joshua set aside a whole day to perform mass circumcision. And God was pleased.

God adopted this ancient rite to show that his people were consecrated and dedicated to him. It was his way of marking his people, to show that they were holy.

Throughout Scripture circumcision is a metaphor for holiness. Moses complained that he had "uncircumcised lips" (Ex. 6:12 KJV), by which he meant his speech was not fit to participate in God's program. Jeremiah spoke of uncircumcised ears, that is, ears unfit to hear God's word. When Israel entered the Promised Land, they were to regard its fruit as uncircumcised for three years, but in the fourth year "all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord" (Lev.



19:24). Jeremiah issued the call to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts” (Jer. 4:4). A circumcised heart referred to the intellectual-emotional-spiritual part of a person where decisions are made. It was a call to radical spiritual surgery where the spirit was broken, the heart was open, and the will was submissive to God. It provided the true identity of God’s people. It was a way that they would represent God to the world.

- [Q] What was the point of circumcision?
- [Q] How can we make sure we have circumcised hearts?
- [Q] What distinguishing marks should Christians have today?

Teaching point two: God calls his people to holiness.

In like manner, God calls his people to holiness today. A holy person is not an odd person, but a distinct person. A holy person has a quality about their life that is separate. Their present lifestyle is not only different from their past lifestyle, but is different from the lifestyles of the unbelievers around them. Holy people represent the likeness of Jesus Christ to a watching world.

Read 1 Peter 1:15–16. We have been commanded to live a holy life—energetic and blazing with holiness. Holiness, to be different, is not an option. It is mandatory. It is what marks us as God-followers.

- [Q] What does it mean to be holy? How can we live this way?
- [Q] Give one practical example of how you have grown in holiness since becoming a Christian.

Optional Activity

Purpose: To demonstrate what holiness is.

Activity: The leader should look up the word “holy” in the dictionary and write out the definition on a piece of paper, folding it once. (The leader should use the definition that best describes holy as described in this lesson.) Give the rest of the group a piece of paper that looks exactly the same. Each member of the group should write their own definition of the word “holy” on the piece of paper, fold it, and hand it to the leader. The leader will read all the definitions in random order. Each member of the group will vote on which one they think is the dictionary definition.

Teaching point three: The problem is we’re afraid to be different.

The problem is we don’t want to be different. There are three basic reasons why:

We value conformity. We don’t want to stand out of the crowd. We wear the same style of clothes, we talk similarly, we conform to the “in” things. Like Bron’s governess, what we fear most is being different. We have become an assembly line society. We are terrified of being set apart.



We visualize a caricature of holiness. We think it communicates an attitude of being holier-than-thou. We disdain behavior that puts one on a pedestal as being better than the rest. Jesus despised this type of mentality and morality in the Pharisees, and we agree with him.

We misunderstand what it means to be holy. We think that holy people live in far away monasteries, separate themselves from any kind of fun and frivolity, and trade in their comfortable homes and well-paying jobs for a peace corps stint in a third world county. Consequently, we say, “No, thank you” to holiness.

- [Q] How might the Hebrews have felt about being different by being circumcised? Why do you think they obeyed God’s command?
- [Q] How is the holiness God calls us to today different than physical circumcision? How is it the same?
- [Q] How can we overcome our desire to fit in no matter what with the society around us?
- [Q] How can we avoid becoming holier-than-thou?
- [Q] Does holiness ever mean that we give up comfort and wealth?

Teaching point four: God’s people should think and act differently.

What does it mean to be different? It means that we think differently. Our minds must be holy if our behavior is to be holy.

A natural outgrowth of our right thinking is right living. When we begin to think differently, we begin to live differently. We live a life that people notice for its distinctiveness—a life that represents Jesus Christ.

Henry Thoreau, a rugged New England writer and individualist of the 19th century, once went to jail rather than pay his poll tax to a state that supported slavery. During this period he wrote his essay “Civil Disobedience”—now famous the world over.

Thoreau’s good friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, hurried to visit him in jail, and peering through the bars exclaimed: “Why, Henry, what are you doing in there?”

The uncowed Thoreau replied, “Nay, Ralph, the question is, what are you doing out there?”

Who is the different one—Little Bron or his governess? Thoreau in jail or the rest of us outside?

Holiness is not merely a matter of theology, but should be demonstrated in our daily lives. Blaise Pascal wrote, “The serene, silent beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence in the world, next to the might of the Spirit of God.”

- [Q] Read Proverbs 23:7. How do our thoughts change our behavior?
- [Q] Read Romans 12:2. Write down (for your eyes only) one way that you have let the world squeeze you into its mold. What does it mean to renew your mind? How does that transform you? How does that help you do God’s will?



[Q] Read 1 Peter 1:17. What does it mean that we are strangers here? What does reverent fear towards God look like?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Today the world has a desperate need for people who are different. Living such a way, like circumcision, will not be easy; in fact, at times it will be painful. But it will make a difference.

The world needs to see people whose actions match their words. They aren't looking for perfect; they're looking for real as illustrated in this poem by a woman named Maggie:

Do you know
do you understand
that you represent
Jesus to me?
Do you know
do you understand
that when you treat me with gentleness,
it raises the question in my mind
that maybe he is gentle, too.
Maybe He isn't someone
who laughs when I am hurt.
Do you know
do you understand
that when you listen to my questions
and you don't laugh,
I think, "What if Jesus is interest in me, too?"
Do you know
do you understand
that when I hear you talk about arguments
and conflict and scars from your past,
I think, "Maybe I am just a regular person
instead of a bad, no-good little girl
who deserves abuse."
If you care,
I think maybe He cares—
and then there's this flame of hope
that burns inside of me
and for a while
I am afraid to breathe
because it might go out.
Do you know
do you understand
that your words are His words?
Your face, His face
to someone like me?
Please, be who you say you are.
Please, God, don't let this be another trick.



Please let this be real.
Please.
Do you know
do you understand
that you represent
Jesus to me?

What Maggie needed were people who displayed a holiness that was real and genuine. People who were different, not for difference's sake, but to represent Jesus. People who would pay the price of living distinctively.

Sometime later, Maggie gave her life to Jesus. When asked why she crossed the line of faith, she replied, "You see, I just met a whole bunch of people who were like Jesus to me. That's all it took."

We need people who will be Jesus at the office, in Congress, in society, in the classroom, at home. We need people who will be different. People who live a vibrant faith even though the rest of society thinks they are different.

One does not get that kind of faith except through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the one that calls us to stand out of the crowd, to be distinct, separate, unusual. He calls us to be different.

[Q] How would Maggie feel if she was part of our small group? Would she see Jesus in us?

[Q] Think of one person who is the "Maggie" in your life, who is watching whether your life matches your words. How might you change your behavior towards him/her?

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 4

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Mark of Distinctiveness

God calls his people to holiness.

God has always desired that his people be set apart—that there be a distinguishing mark upon them, that they be different. When the Hebrews crossed the Jordan to occupy the Promised Land, God marked them through an act called circumcision. Circumcision was an outward sign of inward obedience. It was a physical act that marked their identity as the people of God.

In like manner, God calls his people to holiness today. This study will demonstrate that a holy person is not an odd person, but a distinct person, who reflects God to those around them.

Scripture:

Joshua 5:1–9

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

C.E. Montague's novel, *Rough Justice*, describes Bron, a little boy who went to church for the first time with his governess. Bron watches the preacher climb into the high pulpit and hears him tell some terrible news about a brave and kind man who was nailed to a cross, terribly hurt, a long time ago, and who still feels dreadful pain even now, because there was something not done that he wants them all to do.

Little Bron thinks that the preacher is telling the story because a lot of people are there, and they will do something about it. Bron sits impatiently on the edge of the pew. He can hardly wait to see what the first move will be in righting this injustice. But he sits quietly and decides that after the service someone will do something about it. Little Bron begins to weep, but nobody else seems at all upset. The service ends, and the people walk away as if they had not heard such terrible news, as if nothing remarkable had happened.

As Bron leaves the church, he is trembling. His governess says, "Bron, don't take it to heart—someone will think you are different."

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God wants his people to be set apart.

Teaching point two: God calls his people to holiness.

Teaching point three: The problem is we're afraid to be different.

Teaching point four: God's people should think and act differently.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Today the world has a desperate need for people who are different. Living such a way, like circumcision, will not be easy; in fact, at times it will be painful. But it will make a difference.

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 5

LEADER'S GUIDE

When God Thwarts Your Plans

Interruptions remind us that God is in control.

The night before decisive battles is never easy. Joshua, the commander of the Hebrew army, knew the feeling the night before the initial battle at Jericho to take possession of the Promised Land. He knew the tactical and morale importance of winning this battle.

In the middle of that night, while walking in the wilderness, Joshua was confronted by a solitary figure with a drawn sword. God revealed himself in human terms to arrest Joshua's attention, to deliver an important message.

This study will help you learn what Joshua was learning, what all faith walkers eventually learn: that when we say yes to God, he has the right to interrupt our lives.

Scripture:

Joshua 5:13–6:5

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the "Participant's Guide" included at the end of this study.

Although Jericho was not a large or hugely populated city, it was well fortified with a strong military presence. The Hebrews were so close to the land of milk and honey, they could taste it. But there seemed to be no way under, over, around, or through. From their perspective it looked hopeless.

Is it any wonder on the eve of the critical battle Joshua was awake all night, pacing in the wilderness, talking to himself, questioning the strategy he had work on for years, doubting the resolve and the conviction of his troops?

In the middle of that night, God came to him in human form. Joshua knew that God would not show up for a casual visit. There had to be a reason. Joshua had the good sense to ask, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

God needed to get Joshua in the right frame of mind and spirit to receive his message. Notice the contrasts. While Joshua was walking, God wanted Joshua still. While Joshua was upright, God wanted Joshua prostrate. While Joshua was pondering, God wanted Joshua praying. While Joshua was looking at his problem, God wanted Joshua to see his provider. While Joshua was contemplating strategy, God wanted Joshua to confidently obey. While Joshua feared defeat, God wanted Joshua to realize victory. While Joshua thought he was in charge, God wanted to take control.

The night before decisive battles is never easy.

God got Joshua's attention to reveal some valuable lessons. And so it will be for us.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Describe a time in your life when you lost sleep over a dilemma.
- [Q] Did God help you get over your fears and anxiety in that situation? If so, how?
- [Q] How does God usually speak to you?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Presence is more powerful than words.

Read Joshua 5:13–15. Joshua was alone that night. He did not need a sermon, a speech, or a scolding. He needed someone to share this moment with him. Could it be that God became a man so he could walk alongside Joshua? Could it be that God took on human flesh so that his presence could be more than felt? So that he could walk and talk with Joshua, friend to friend, commander to commander?



When I picture God and Joshua together that night, it reminds me of one of the major offensives of World War II, when Dwight Eisenhower was walking near the Rhine River. The night before the battle, Eisenhower came upon a GI who seemed depressed and discouraged.

“How are you feeling?” the general asked.

“General,” the young man replied, “I’m awful nervous.”

“Well,” Eisenhower said, “you and I are a good pair then, because I’m nervous too.

Maybe if we just walk along together, we’ll be good for each other.”

No sermon, no speech, no scolding. Just one man coming alongside another.

God, in human flesh, came alongside Joshua to remind him that he was not fighting this battle alone. He could not only be felt, he could be touched. He could not only be heard, he could be seen. God wasn’t a thought, a concept, a principle. He was a living reality.

[Q] How does Joshua’s experience encourage you?

[Q] Since God doesn’t appear personally to most people, how can we experience his presence in our lives?

[Q] How can you represent God’s presence to someone else?

Teaching point two: With God’s presence comes God’s promise.

Read Joshua 6:1–2. Before a single shot was fired, before any military action was taken, before any strategy was implemented, God promised victory. On that decisive night before the inaugural battle when God visited Joshua, a guarantee was pledged. God enabled Joshua to visualize victory because, in God’s eyes, the victory was won. Sure the campaign would still have to be conducted, the strategy implemented, the backpacks packed, the weapons used, but the final outcome was secured. The winning team was already picked. The trophy already engraved. The hats and t-shirts already printed. The banquet hall for the victory celebration already reserved. It was a done deal.

There’s a story about some theology students playing basketball during their seminary days. An elderly janitor was reading his Bible as he waited for them to finish so he could clean up the gym. As the future pastors and church leaders walked off the court one asked, “What are you reading?”

“The Bible,” the custodian responded.

“What part?” the student inquired.

“Revelation,” the older gentleman replied.

“That book confounds many of my professors. Do you understand it?” the student asked.

“Sure do,” the old man said.

Curiously and with a hint of sarcasm the seminarian asked, “Well, what does it mean?”



“It means our side is gonna win,” the old man answered with a grin.

When God promised Joshua that he and the Hebrews would be victorious, Joshua believed him. Joshua was seeing firsthand his holiness and might, and he knew that no river was too wide, no situation too difficult and, especially, no wall too formidable or city too impregnable for the Lord. Joshua confidently believed that God would fulfill his promise of victory.

[Q] How does knowing that God has written the end of the story give you comfort?

[Q] Name some of God’s promises to us from his Word. Which one would you most like to claim right now?

Teaching point three: God’s ways and timing are better than ours.

Read Joshua 6:3–5. God’s ways are not my ways. While this at times is frustrating, it’s also reassuring.

Joshua was a military strategist. For years he had been planning his tactics and strategy for the battle at Jericho. His was a masterful plan. It would indeed bring victory for the Hebrews.

As worried as he was that night about his army and the enemy, he was not at all concerned about his plan. It was brilliant. I bet he even took this clandestine meeting in the shadows as the perfect opportunity to impress the Almighty with his plan. “Look, at this strategy, Lord. It’s really good. We will surround the city and cut off the food and water supply lines. Then we will surprise the city with advancement at night. We will send two divisions over the wall with ladders; two divisions will use battering rams on the doors; and two will build ramparts to scale the walls. Clever right? All the latest techniques known to modern warfare will be used. Sheer military genius, if I say so myself.”

Joshua was ready to hear words of affirmation and confirmation. He did not. Instead, God gave Joshua a different strategy, an unusual plan. No weapons. No surprise attack. No catapults. No battering rams. No multiple movements. No clandestine operations. No special forces. Just stroll around the city. Blow the shofars. And yell like madmen. It was not a spectacular plan. In fact, it was rather mundane, almost boring. “That’s it? That’s your plan, Lord?” Joshua must have said. “But, Lord, marching around the city and making a lot of noise and waiting for the walls to collapse is not in any of my military manuals.”

To the natural mind God’s plan sounds illogical. It is. It seems to go against human wisdom. It does. It makes us look foolish. It will. In impossible situations, God sometimes purposely goes against human logic so that we can’t rely on our own expertise and reasoning or our wizardry or gadgets. Sometimes God accomplishes his plans in ways that are nothing short of miraculous behind the mundane.

The danger of our contemporary way of looking to the future is that we want to borrow God’s power to accomplish our plans. We are teetering precariously close to blasphemy and idolatry.

[Q] Give an example of when you’ve made your plans and asked God to bless them? What’s wrong with that? What should we be doing instead?

[Q] Name a time where God changed your plans and it turned out for the better.



- [Q] Why is God's timing crucial to any venture?
- [Q] How do you make plans? Discuss the pros and cons of each of the following:
- 1) I pray and ask God for wisdom.
 - 2) I read the Scriptures and then do what seems best.
 - 3) I discuss it with people I trust.
 - 4) I act on my "gut" instinct.
 - 5) I plunder ahead on my own. It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission.

Teaching point four: God doesn't come to take sides, he comes to take over.

Reread Joshua 5:14–15. When God visited Joshua that night, it was for more than support and encouragement; it was for more than revealing the strange strategy; it was to see where Joshua stood. In other words, who was controlling Joshua? When God said, "As commander of the army of the LORD, I have now come," it was his way of saying, "Joshua, I didn't come to take sides with you. I came to take over! If you let me take command, you'll conquer Jericho and, ultimately, the entirety of Canaan. But if you refuse to put me in charge, you are going to lose."

Joshua fell down before God incarnate and removed his sandals. He realized that he was in the presence of the ultimate Commander in Chief. Then and there Joshua consecrated to do battle according to God's will, not his own. He put God in charge of his life, his affairs, and his army. Only then was he ready to receive and execute God's plan. Only then would the army of Israel be victorious.

For Joshua the real battle was won that night in the desert before the actual battle.

Many of our battles are not really ours, but God's. God has promised his presence, his provision, his plan, and his power. Before we face the difficulties and struggles of life, we should put God in charge. Many of our battles are tests of control—not a test to see who wins the battle, but a test to determine if we will give God control.

The hardest thing to do the night before decisive battles is to give them to God.

- [Q] What might have happened to Israel if Joshua hadn't given God the battle of Jericho?
- [Q] What areas of your life do you need to give to God? What have you been asking him to take your side on that you simply need to give him to rearrange?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

People often face the battles of life in one of four ways:

- *Presumption.* We say, "The tragedies of life will never happen to me. I'm insulated. I'm protected. I'm careful." Presumption causes us to be blindsided.



- *Pride.* We say, “When the battles come, I’ll make it through on my own. I don’t need anyone else. I’m tough. I’m the captain of my fate.” Pride causes us to fall.
- *Panic.* We say, “Oh, no. Not me. What will I do? I never expected this. I’m not ready. My life will crumble in. The enemy will defeat me.” Panic causes us to retreat.
- *Present.* We say, “God, I know I’ve got to fight. You’ve not taken me out of the skirmish. But I want you to lead the way. So by faith I’m putting you in charge. Will you take over?” Present enables us to move forward in obedience.

The night before decisive battles is never easy. The next time you find yourself pacing the floor, give God control of your situation, put him in charge, and go back to bed.

[Q] Are you more likely to err on the side of *presumption*, *pride*, or *panic*? How can we move from each of those errors to present?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us identify *presumption*, *pride* and *panic*.

Activity: On three separate sheets of paper, write the following:

- *Julia has been dating a man who has a drug problem. Illustrate how she may be living with the attitude of presumption by role-playing her reasoning for the group.*
- *Tory’s business is facing bankruptcy. Illustrate how he may be living with the attitude of pride by role-playing his reasoning for the group.*
- *Celia believes God is calling her to go on a short-term mission trip. Illustrate how she may be living with the attitude of panic by role-playing her reasoning for the group.*

When everyone has finished, ask the group to brainstorm on how *Julia*, *Tory*, and *Celia* could live with the attitude of present instead.

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

When God Thwarts Your Plans

Interruptions remind us that God is in control.

The night before decisive battles is never easy. Joshua, the commander of the Hebrew army, knew the feeling the night before the initial battle at Jericho to take possession of the Promised Land. He knew the tactical and morale importance of winning this battle.

In the middle of that night, while walking in the wilderness, Joshua was confronted by a solitary figure with a drawn sword. God revealed himself in human terms to arrest Joshua's attention, to deliver an important message.

This study will help you learn what Joshua was learning, what all faith walkers eventually learn: that when we say yes to God, he has the right to interrupt our lives.

Scripture:

Joshua 5:13-6:5

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Although Jericho was not a large or hugely populated city, it was well fortified with a strong military presence. The Hebrews were so close to the land of milk and honey, they could taste it. But there seemed to be no way under, over, around, or through. From their perspective it looked hopeless.

The night before decisive battles is never easy.

God got Joshua's attention to reveal some valuable lessons. And so it will be for us.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Presence is more powerful than words.

Teaching point two: With God's presence comes God's promise.

Teaching point three: God's ways and timing are better than ours.

[Q] How do you make plans? Discuss the pros and cons of each of the following:

- 1) I pray and ask God for wisdom.
- 2) I read the Scriptures and then do what seems best.
- 3) I discuss it with people I trust.
- 4) I act on my "gut" instinct.
- 5) I plunder ahead on my own. It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission.

Teaching point four: God doesn't come to take sides, he comes to take over.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The night before decisive battles is never easy. The next time you find yourself pacing the floor, give God control of your situation, put him in charge, and go back to bed.

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 6

LEADER'S GUIDE

Sin Will Find Us Out

Covering up sin leads to severe consequences.

If you ever think that sin is not serious business to God, then read the story of Achan and the defeat of the Israelite army at Ai. The lessons God wants to teach us are too important to be trivialized, and often a tragedy is the best way to get our attention.

In this session we will see that all humans are sinners, but our sin does not have to be fatal. Through Christ's work on the cross and our confession, we can find forgiveness.

Scripture:
Joshua 7

Based on:
"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the "Participant's Guide" included at the end of this study.

The battle at Jericho was a miraculous victory. Without firing a single shot or raising a single weapon, the walls of the mighty fortress came tumbling down.

The next battle in the campaign was to destroy the town of Ai, a dusty crossroads compared to the fortress of Jericho. The spies sent to Ai to investigate reported that it would not be necessary to send the entire army to the battle; two or three thousand troops would be sufficient. Without consulting with God, these men traveled to Ai and were soundly defeated. Thirty-six died as the troops ran for their lives. This may not seem like a significant loss in an army of 3,000, but this was the only defeat recorded in Joshua and the only report of Hebrews slain in battle.

What caused the defeat?

As the story unfolded it was discovered that God's presence, power, protection, and provision were not with the Hebrew army because someone had violated the ban regarding the devoted things that the Lord had specifically instructed the people to put in the Lord's treasury.

Every tribe came before Joshua to give an account. Each man, woman, boy, and girl was questioned to see if they were the culprits. Finally, a man by the name of Achan confessed. His sin was out in the open.

The result? Like life, stories in the Bible do not always have fairy-tale endings. Achan, along with his entire family, was stoned to death.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Why do you think God dealt so harshly with Achan? What about Achan's sin was so repugnant to God?
- [Q] Why does God hate sin so much? What are we saying about God when we sin?
- [Q] Do we take sin too lightly today? What should be our attitude toward sin?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Sin contaminates every human being.

Read Joshua 7. We all are like Achan. We share the same defect. Every person on God's green earth is infected with it. The hedonists are infected because they are pleasure-centered and not God-centered. The judgmentalists are infected because they are high-minded and not God-minded. The legalists are infected because they are work-driven and not grace-driven. So are liberals, fundamentalists, Baptists, Methodists, Mormons, Catholics, and Charismatics. Rich



and poor. Americans and Russians. People locked in jail cells and those living in luxury can't escape it. Laity are infected, as well as clergy.

No one is immune. No one. That includes me. And you.

Make no mistake about it, sin is real. Just as real as the air we breathe. This condition, this nature, this defect, is a part of each one of us.

[Q] When you think of the word sin, what comes to your mind?

[Q] Read Romans 3:23. How does falling short of the glory of God help define sin?

Teaching point two: Sin contaminates the being of every human.

Not only does sin contaminate every human being, it contaminates the being of every human. Like a drop of dye placed in a clean glass of water, the dye's color permeates every molecule of water. Like a rotten apple in a bushel basket, the toxins of the rotting apple infect the whole bunch.

Sin is destructive. It contaminates our relationships with God, those we love, and our inner harmony and peace. Tony Campolo in *Seven Deadly Sins* says, "Each of us comes into the world with a predisposition to live in such a way as to inflict pain on those who love us most, and to offend the God who cares for us infinitely."

The story of Achan illustrates the fatal contamination of sin. This story reveals how sin leads to defeat, discouragement, doubt, dishonor, disgrace, deception, and destruction. But the contamination nature of sin hinges on two diabolical characteristics and consequences: disobedience and death.

[Q] Sin starts with disobedience. Reread Josh. 7:11. How is sin more like the act of a traitor than that of a criminal?

Leader's Note: *A criminal violates the law; a traitor violates his citizenship. Sin is far worse than breaking the law. It is breaking the relationship with the grace-giver. Sin is a raised hand, a clenched fist, a blow in the face of God.*

[Q] How is this reflected in Achan's sin?

[Q] Reread Josh. 7:25–26. How is sin a fatal disease for all of us? Compare what sin does to our lives with what shears do to a flower.

Leader's Note: *A cut of the stem separates a flower from the source of life. The flower may look attractive, colorful and strong. But watch the flower over a period of time; the leaves will wilt and the petals will drop. No matter what you do, the flower will never live again. We humans with sin defects have no life. Cut off from God, the soul withers and dies. The consequence of sin is not a bad day or a bad mood but a dead soul.*

Teaching point three: It is not fatal to be a sinner.

While sin contaminates every human being and contaminates the being of every human, it is not fatal to be a sinner. Denying that you are a sinner is fatal. If unrecognized and not dealt



with, sin will destroy us. We are robbed of meaning, prevented from being healthy and whole persons, estranged from a loving relationship with God, and destined for eternal damnation.

In his book *Fuzzy Memories*, Jack Handey writes, “There used to be this bully who would demand my lunch money every day. Since I was smaller, I would give it to him. Then I decided to fight back. I started taking karate lessons. But then the karate lesson guy said I had to start paying him five dollars a lesson. So I just went back to paying the bully.”

Isn't that like us? Too many of us feel it is easier to pay the bully than it is to learn how to defeat him. Too many of us keep trying to function with the defect rather than getting it repaired. Too many of us succumb to defeat rather than learning the countermeasures that lead to victory.

What do we do?

[Q] *Recognize sin for its destructive and diabolical nature.* Read Matthew 5:29–30. What is Jesus trying to tell us about sin in this passage?

[Q] *Confess your sin and receive Christ's forgiveness.* Read 1 John 1:5–9. How is confession for the soul similar to what the mechanic does for the defective car? Is confession begging God to forgive you, or agreeing with God about the sin and defects of our lives? Explain your answer.

Leader's Note: *Confession owns up to the fact that our behavior wasn't just the result of bad parenting, poor genes, jealous siblings, or a chemical imbalance. Confession means saying that we made a choice, and it does not need to be excused, explained, or even understood. The choice needs to be forgiven.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

In the movie *The Last Emperor*, the young child anointed as the last emperor of China lives a life of luxury with 1,000 servants at his command. “What happens when you do wrong?” his brother asks. “When I do wrong, someone else is punished,” the boy emperor replies. To demonstrate, he breaks a jar, and one of the servants is beaten.

In Christianity, Jesus reversed that ancient pattern: when the servants erred, the King was punished. Grace is free only because the giver himself has borne the cost.

—Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Zondervan, 1997)

This is the message of the cross. It's the message of redemption. It's the hope of all defective people everywhere.

[Q] Have you trusted Christ to take your place, covering the guilt of your sins? If not, discuss with the group how you can trust him.

[Q] Think of at least one person who needs to understand that they are sinners in need of a Savior. Commit to pray for that person, looking for an opportunity to share the things from this lesson with him/her.



Optional Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate that God holds us accountable for sin, but also is anxious to forgive us.*

Activity: *Give everyone a note card. Each person should write a letter to God, agreeing with him about his or her sin and asking him to forgive them.*

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Sin Will Find Us Out

Covering up sin leads to severe consequences.

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In this session we will see that all humans are sinners, but our sin does not have to be fatal. Through Christ's work on the cross and our confession, we can find forgiveness.

Scripture:
Joshua 7

Based on:
"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

The battle at Jericho was a miraculous victory. Without firing a single shot or raising a single weapon, the walls of the mighty fortress came tumbling down.

The next battle in the campaign was to destroy the town of Ai, a dusty crossroads compared to the fortress of Jericho. The spies sent to Ai to investigate reported that it would not be necessary to send the entire army to the battle; two or three thousand troops would be sufficient. Without consulting with God, these men traveled to Ai and were soundly defeated.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Sin contaminates every human being.

Teaching point two: Sin contaminates the being of every human.

Teaching point three: It is not fatal to be a sinner.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

In the movie *The Last Emperor*, the young child anointed as the last emperor of China lives a life of luxury with 1,000 servants at his command. "What happens when you do wrong?" his brother asks. "When I do wrong, someone else is punished," the boy emperor replies. To demonstrate, he breaks a jar, and one of the servants is beaten.

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—*by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon*



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 7

LEADER'S GUIDE

Winning Life's Battles

Battles are inevitable; therefore, believers must be ready for the fight.

Battles are inevitable. While they may not be looming on the horizon, they will come. No one is exempt. No one can go AWOL. The battles of life often come without warning, or at the very most, with little notice. Therefore, we must be at a state of readiness for the battles of life. If we wait till the battle is upon us, it may be too late.

A plan for winning life's battles is found in Joshua 8. This study will examine how God marshals great power to the side of the individual that stands face-to-face and toe-to-toe with the enemy. God can turn tragedy into triumph, defeat into victory, and calamity into conquest.

Scripture:

Joshua 8:1-28

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the "Participant's Guide" included at the end of this study.

In late October of 1944 an officer commanding a platoon of American soldiers received a call ordering him to recapture a small French city from the Nazis. For weeks, French Resistance fighters had risked their lives to gather information about the German fortifications in that city, and they had smuggled this information out to the Allies.

The French Underground's efforts provided the Americans with something worth its weight in gold: a detailed map of the city. It wasn't just a map with the names of major streets and landmarks; it showed specific details of the enemy's defensive positions.

Before the soldiers moved out to take their objective, the captain gave each man a chance to study the map and gave them a test covering the major landmarks and enemy strongholds. As a result, the men captured the city with little loss of American lives.

Like these men we will face battles in our lives. Fortunately for believers in Christ, we, like the American platoon, have been given a map—a detailed plan for how to win when facing the battles of life.

This plan for winning life's battles is found in Joshua 8. The Hebrew nation had suffered its one and only defeat at Ai due to the sinfulness of one person. Now under God's direction, they were ready to follow his plan to victory. The map God gave Joshua is the same map that we need to study, learn, and know in order to stand the tests and trials of daily living.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Name the kind of battles we face in our daily lives.
- [Q] Read Ecclesiastes 9:11–12. What does this verse tell you about the battles that come in this life?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us realize that we are always in a battle.*

Activity: *Pass out newspapers to each group member. Have them cut out any article that illustrates a battle that someone is facing. Tape each one to a poster board and discuss them briefly.*

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Be in a state of readiness for the battles of life.

In our military, each branch of service has "Readiness Units" that are always prepared at a moments notice to go into battle. Their bags are packed, their weapons cleaned, their



ammunition stocked, their rations supplied, their jets in top mechanical working order, and their training complete. Why? Because no one knows when our national security may be threatened.

Likewise, the battles of life often come without warning, or at the very most, with little notice. Therefore, we must be at a state of readiness for the battles of life.

A sturdy but timid young man asked a farmer for a job as a farm hand. "What can you do?" inquired the farmer.

"I can do whatever has to be done, and I can sleep when the storms come," replied the applicant.

Although mystified by the phrase "sleep when the storms come," the farmer did not press the question but hired the young man.

Some nights later a violent storm awoke the farmer. He got up and tried unsuccessfully to arouse the farm hand, then with considerable annoyance went out himself to see if all was well.

He found the barn locked, the chicken coop properly closed up, a wagonload of hay covered with a tarpaulin that was securely battened down, and all else in a condition of safety from the elements. Then the farmer realized what his new farm hand meant when he said: "I can sleep when the storms come."

[Q] Read Romans 8:37–38. Are we in a battle even when we don't see it? Who is the battle with?

[Q] Read 2 Chronicles 20:15. According to this verse, whom does the battle belong to? Does this apply to our lives? What does it mean that the battle is the Lord's?

[Q] Read Psalm 24:7–8. How does this description of God help you trust him with your battle?

Teaching point two: Go to God for help in battle.

Read Joshua 8:1–28. The previous defeat of the Hebrew army at the hands of the men of Ai came not only because of the sin of Achan but also because the Hebrews failed to go to God for direction and guidance. They had experienced a miraculous victory at Jericho; perhaps they felt they didn't need God's help. After the humiliating defeat, the Hebrews quickly realized the stupidity of their assumption. It only took them one defeat to go to God before any battle.

Prayer is not the position of last resort, but of first priority. Prayer is our emergency number when facing the battles and crises in life.

When someone dials 911, he's connected with a dispatcher who is reading a computer screen with the telephone number, address, and the name by which that telephone number is listed. Also listening in are the police, the fire department, and the paramedics.

A caller might not be able to say what the problem is because they are in such distress. But the dispatcher doesn't need him to say anything. He knows where the call is coming from. Help is already on the way.



There come times in our lives when facing battles, we dial 911 prayers. Sometimes we're hysterical. Sometimes we don't know the words to speak. But God hears. He knows our name and our situation. Help is on the way; God has already begun to marshal his forces.

- [Q] Why was the Hebrew army confident this time when they went to battle against Ai? What was different from the last time they attacked Ai?
- [Q] What happens when we become overconfident or complacent as we face our life's battles? How do we receive instructions from the Lord in our battles?
- [Q] What type of prayers do you engage in most?
- 1) Emergency 911 prayers – in the midst of the battle.
 - 2) Prayers full of praise – for victory in the battle.
 - 3) Persistent prayers – asking for the same thing over and over.
 - 4) Preparation prayers – to prepare you for battle.

Are all of these prayers needed? Circle the one you think you need to work on most. Share your commitment with the group.

Teaching point three: Believe in God's promise.

Faith is inevitably linked to victory in life's battles. Lauren King wrote, "They are related, and there is never victory without faith, for faith is the means to victory. But the place and time of faith is separate from that of victory. Faith must come before victory. And when victory is assured, when the results are in and certain, then faith is no longer needed. Faith's work has been done. ... [Faith] is with us in our human condition until the final obtainment, the final victory. Faith remains our necessary resort, our stay and help, not in the day of triumph,... but in the struggle and dust and dimness of our battle."

By faith in God we can live and sing triumphantly as the great hymn writer Fanny Crosby. She faced a lifelong battle of blindness when at six weeks of age a country doctor placed hot poultices on her inflamed eyes. But Fanny Crosby survived that battle and wrote,

- Not to the strong is the battle,
- Not to the swift is the race,
- Yet to the true and the faithful
- Victory is promised through grace.

Reread Joshua 8:1.

- [Q] What did the Hebrews' faith have to do with their victory? What did they believe about God?
- [Q] What role does God's Word play in our faith? Why does knowing his Word help us believe him?



[Q] How does trust in and obedience to God influence the outcome of the battle?

Teaching point four: Face your enemy instead of retreating.

Although the Hebrews had been promised victory, they still had to go to the battle. While Joshua had placed the battle in God's hands, the Hebrew army still had to fight. They couldn't crawl in a bomb shelter and wait for the celebration party. They had to march down to the battlefield.

Faith is never passive. Perhaps, the ultimate test of one's faith is facing the enemy. Never have believers been instructed to retreat from life's battles. According to the New Testament, God has provided believers with a protective armor for facing the battles of life, and interestingly enough, he made no provisions for the back.

It is never in God's will for us to run from the battles of life. If we choose to run, and many people do, the battle will simply be postponed to a later date in the journey. It may have a different look, but it will be the same fight. Why? Because God wants to teach us that he is sufficient for any battle. We can save ourselves a lot of aggravation by standing firm and waiting in God's power.

Have you noticed that God marshals great power to the side of the individual that stands face-to-face and toe-to-toe with the enemy? God can turn tragedy into triumph, defeat into victory, and calamity into conquest when we face the enemy. But not a moment sooner.

The necessary plan has been presented for facing the battles in life. Putting these plans into practice will make the difference between victory and defeat.

[Q] What would have happened if Joshua and his army had become paralyzed by their last encounter with Ai? What would that have meant to their future?

[Q] Read Ephesians 6:13–17. List on a whiteboard the different pieces of armor and what they represent. Which piece of armor do you most need?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Now the rest of the story. Nearly 30 years after the military operation that recaptured the French city for the American army, an army researcher heard the story and decided to base a study on it using a group of American tourists to help him with his research.

For several hours, the men and women were allowed to study the same map the soldiers had, and then they were given the same test. Most of the tourists failed miserably.

The reason for the difference between these two groups was motivation. Knowing their lives were on the line, the soldiers were highly motivated to learn every detail of the map. For the tourists, being in a research study provided some motivation. But most of them had nothing to lose but a little pride if they failed the test.

Will we stand firm as we face the battles of life as a tourist or as a soldier knowing that our very lives are at stake?



[Q] Write down a battle that you or a loved one is facing. Take a few minutes of silent prayer, giving it to God, and asking for his wisdom. If comfortable, share your battle with the group. Ask them to pray for courage and wisdom for you.

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 7

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Winning Life's Battles

Battles are inevitable; therefore, believers must be ready for the fight.

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Scripture:
Joshua 8:1-28

Based on:
"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

A plan for winning life's battles is found in Joshua 8. The Hebrew nation had suffered its one and only defeat at Ai due to the sinfulness of one person. Now under God's direction, they were ready to follow his plan to victory. The map God gave Joshua is the same map that we need to study, learn, and know in order to stand the tests and trials of daily living.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Be in a state of readiness for the battles of life.

Teaching point two: Go to God for help in battle.

[Q] What type of prayers do you engage in most?

- 1) Emergency 911 prayers – in the midst of the battle.
- 2) Prayers full of praise – for victory in the battle.
- 3) Persistent prayers – asking for the same thing over and over.
- 4) Preparation prayers – to prepare you for battle.

Are all of these prayers needed? Circle the one you think you need to work on most. Share your commitment with the group.

Teaching point three: Believe in God's promise.

Teaching point four: Face your enemy instead of retreating.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Will we stand firm as we face the battles of life as a tourist or as a soldier knowing that our very lives are at stake?

—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 8

LEADER'S GUIDE

Finding God in Miraculous Events

Understanding miraculous events in light of contemporary ideas on miracles.

Perhaps one of the most spectacular miracles in the Bible occurred when Joshua was leading the Hebrews in possessing the Promised Land and the sun stood still. God heard the cry for help and answered with supernatural intervention. It was an extraordinary day manifested by divine intervention in human affairs in the world. It was a wonder on earth that could only be explained by heavenly logic. It was a supernatural event not governed by the laws of time and space.

The day was lengthened. The enemy was defeated. God was glorified.

This study examines the role of miracles in history and today.

Scripture:

Joshua 10:1-15

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participants Guide included at the end of this study.

Are there wonders on earth that can only be explained by heaven? Are there supernatural happenings that are not governed by laws of time and space?

According to a recent *Newsweek* poll, 84 percent of adult Americans say they believe God performs miracles, and 48 percent report that they have experienced or witnessed one.

Three-fourths of American Catholics, 81 percent of evangelicals, 54 percent of other Protestants, and 43 percent of non-Christians and people of no faith at all say they have prayed to God or a saint for a miracle.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Do you believe in miracles? Have you experienced or witnessed one?
- [Q] When most people pray for miracles, do they really expect one to happen? Why or why not?
- [Q] How have you or someone you know handled it when God didn't provide a miracle?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: There is a real enemy in the world.

Read Joshua 10:1–5. Make no mistake about it. Joshua was facing a real opposition, an enemy that was using all of its muscle and might, creativity and collaboration to defeat and destroy the Hebrews. At every turn as Joshua advanced in his conquest of the Promised Land, he faced the enemy. He was opposed. He was attacked. He was put to the test.

Just as the enemy Joshua faced in occupying the Holy Land was real, so is the enemy we face in the world. The enemy is known by many nicknames: Sickness, suffering, pain, disunity, bickering, even death. But his given name is Satan.

Satan is real and alive. And he is seeking to defeat and destroy anything and anyone that would make advancement for God and his kingdom.

To defeat the enemy, divine intervention is needed. Human effort and ingenuity is not enough. God must manifest himself in a supernatural way that defies the laws of time and space. A miracle is needed.

- [Q] The dictionary defines a miracle as an event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature and so is held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God. Do you think this is an accurate definition? Why or why not?



[Q] Have you seen God act on your behalf against Satan in any area of your life? Do you consider this a miracle? Why or why not?

Teaching point two: God initiates miracles.

Read Joshua 10:10–15. God was the initiator in both the miracles of the hailstorm and the sun standing still for the Hebrew army.

The enemy is real, but God is at work. All miracles have God as the originator. God wants and even desires to do a great work, a miracle if needed. In fact, he is performing miracles all the time.

Here is where we often miss the hand of God. We too often look for God in the spectacular and miss him in the routine. We put a premium on the extraordinary, when God often works in the ordinary. In the story of Joshua and the Hebrews taking the land of promise, there was not a steady flow of miracles. But God was still working. So let's not miss God in the everyday.

[Q] The Hebrews of Joshua's time had only the first five books of the Bible. What difference does it make that today we have 66 books of the Bible that record all of God's miracles and his plan of salvation?

[Q] Can you name something that has happened recently that you failed to recognize as God's doing?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) God only did miraculous things in the past. He no longer performs miracles.
- 2) God performs miracles today, but they are more in the nature of changed lives.
- 3) God performs miracles today, but mostly in cultures that do not readily have his Word.
- 4) God performs miracles daily everywhere.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? How does your point of view affect the way you live?

Teaching point three: God used one person's prayer.

Reread Joshua 10:14. Never underestimate the power of prayer. Past, present, future, time, and space—nothing lies beyond the reach of believing prayer. Prayer breaches the borders of humanity and Deity. Though we are utterly human, when we pray we venture into the realm of the divine. Through prayer we can touch the supernatural, even God himself.

If miracles are the river, prayer is the riverbed through which they flow. If miracles are the overflow we seek, then prayer is the pipeline through which they come. We cannot separate miracles and prayer. To speak of one is to speak of the other for we cannot experience miracles apart from prayer.

Herein lies the problem. As the apostle James wrote, "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). We often desire to see God working in our lives but don't always convert that desire into requesting God to work. Or we request miracles for selfish reasons. We have been



led to believe that God exists to serve us. We turn a belief in miracles to our own self-interest in an effort to have God work for our agenda, not his.

God does not perform miracles for his own amusement or for our convenience.

- [Q] Read Mark 11:22–25. What was Jesus saying in this verse? Did he want us to pray for an actual mountain to be thrown into the sea? Why do you think he put it this way? What principles of prayer do you see in these verses? What does verse 25 have to do with it?
- [Q] Read Matthew 5:43–44. What is miraculous about praying this kind of prayer? Is it more or less amazing to forgive your enemies than to see the sun stand still?

Teaching point four: Miracles always serve God's purpose.

The church father Augustine taught that miracles have special purposes and that we should see them as gifts to call our attention to something important. For Joshua the purpose of the sun standing still was to further advance God's purpose in possessing a land for his people.

When miracles happen in your life, look for the purpose behind them. God is up to something, and he wants you to join him in his work. Otherwise, the miracle would not be performed.

On the front porch of his little country store in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln said to his partner, Berry, "You know, I want to study law. I wouldn't mind so much if we could sell everything we've got and pay all our bills and have just enough left over to buy one book—*Blackstone's Commentary on English Law*—but I guess I can't."

A strange-looking wagon was coming up the road. The driver angled it up close to the store porch and said, "I'm trying to move my family out west, and I'm out of money. I've got a good barrel here that I could sell for 50 cents."

Lincoln's eyes went along the wagon and came to the wife looking at him pleadingly, face thin and emaciated. Lincoln ran his hand into his pocket and took out, according to him, "the last 50 cents I had" and said, "I reckon I could use a good barrel."

All day long the barrel sat on the porch of that store. Berry kept chiding Lincoln about it. Late in the evening Lincoln walked out and looked into the barrel. He saw something in the bottom of it, papers that he hadn't noticed before. His long arms went down into the barrel and, as he fumbled around, he hit something solid. He pulled out a book and stood petrified: it was *Blackstone's Commentary on English Law*.

Lincoln later wrote, "I stood there holding the book and looking up toward the heavens. There came a deep impression on me that God had something for me to do and He was showing me now that I had to get ready for it. Why this miracle otherwise?"

- [Q] God always performs miracles for a purpose. Name a miracle that you remember from the Bible. What do you think was the purpose of that miracle?
- [Q] If you have been the recipient of a miracle, what was the purpose behind it?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us realize why God performed some of the miracles in the Bible.



Activity: Give everyone a sheet of drawing paper and access to markers. Ask them to draw a picture of a miracle in the Bible. When they are finished, ask them to show their drawing to the group and share what they believe was the purpose of the miracle.

Teaching point five: It takes faith to see God's miracles.

I can imagine that there were a whole bunch of people in Joshua's army who thought it coincidental that the hailstorm came at just the right time to kill so many of the enemy soldiers, and others were thinking to themselves as the sun stood still, *This day is never going to end*. They saw what happened. They experienced what happened. But they passed it off as coincidence. They did not see God's involvement and intervention. A term exists for them: practical atheists. While they believe in God, they just don't think he will show up in their lives.

It takes a faith walker to see the miracles of God.

Miracles will always withhold their meaning from doubters and the incredulous. It takes faith to see the wonders of the miracle-working God we serve.

- [Q] Read John 12:27–29. What happened, and how was that explained?
- [Q] Have you ever experienced a miracle that you did not recognize as such at the time? What do you think the purpose of the miracle was?
- [Q] What seeming coincidence have you experienced in your past that now you can see was the hand of God?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Miracle or no miracle, life is too short to hinge it on hoping for one. At the same time, life is too precious, in fact, too sacred, to miss out on the miracles that are truly right before us: Peace with God, forgiveness and release from guilt, the presence of God in your life, the assurance that even death cannot separate you from a deeply loving God.

Is there a yearning in your heart for this most pivotal of miracles? Are you longing for a supernatural work in your life? Then tap into the miracle of prayer.

Pray: Dear God, I've fallen so far short in my life. My heart is empty. I'm a sinner in need of forgiveness. I turn from all the sin in my life. I ask you to save me, to come into my life, to live your life through me. I relish a life of meaning and purpose. I count on you, my Lord and Savior, to give me a life with you after I die. Transform me, Lord, now and forever.

Wow, what a miracle!

Take a deep breath—just maybe, the first breath of your transformed life.

- [Q] List the areas of your life that you would like to see God perform a miracle in. For example, make you a more loving mother, husband, friend, son, etc., or help you overcome a persistent sin in your life.



—by Rick Ezell, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Joshua: The Journey of a Faith Walker - Study 8

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Finding God in Miraculous Events

*Understanding miraculous events in light of
contemporary ideas on miracles.*

Perhaps one of the most spectacular miracles in the Bible occurred when Joshua was leading the Hebrews in possessing the Promised Land and the sun stood still. God heard the cry for help and answered with supernatural intervention. It was an extraordinary day manifested by divine intervention in human affairs in the world. It was a wonder on earth that could only be explained by heavenly logic. It was a supernatural event not governed by the laws of time and space.

The day was lengthened. The enemy was defeated. God was glorified.

This study examines the role of miracles in history and today.

Scripture:

Joshua 10:1-15

Based on:

"Journey of a Faith Walker," Series Builder by Rick Ezell, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Are there wonders on earth that can only be explained by heaven? Are there supernatural happenings that are not governed by laws of time and space?

According to a recent *Newsweek* poll, 84 percent of adult Americans say they believe God performs miracles, and 48 percent report that they have experienced or witnessed one.

Three-fourths of American Catholics, 81 percent of evangelicals, 54 percent of other Protestants, and 43 percent of non-Christians and people of no faith at all say they have prayed to God or a saint for a miracle.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: There is a real enemy in the world.

Teaching point two: God initiates miracles.

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) God only did miraculous things in the past. He no longer performs miracles.
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Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? How does your point of view affect the way you live?

Teaching point three: God used one person's prayer.

Teaching point four: Miracles always serve God's purpose.

Teaching point five: It takes faith to see God's miracles.



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

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