

## A Study of the Book of Joshua

### Sermon 1

#### “How to Live Life Successfully”

##### Joshua 1:1-9

Success is a difficult thing to truly define. *“Among the apostles, the one absolutely stunning success was Judas, and the one thoroughly groveling failure was Peter. Judas was a success in the ways that most impress us: he was successful both financially and politically. He cleverly arranged to control the money of the apostolic band; he skillfully manipulated the political forces of the day to accomplish his goal. And Peter was a failure in ways that we most dread: he was impotent in a crisis and socially inept. At the arrest of Jesus he collapsed, a hapless, blustering coward; in the most critical situations of his life with Jesus, the confession on the road to Caesarea Philippi and the vision on the Mount of transfiguration, he said the most embarrassingly inappropriate things. He was not the companion we would want with us in time of danger, and he was not the kind of person we would feel comfortable with at a social occasion.*

*Time, of course, has reversed our judgments on the two men. Judas is now a byword for betrayal, and Peter is one of the most honored names in the church and in the world. Judas is a villain; Peter is a saint. Yet the world continues to chase after the successes of Judas, financial wealth and political power, and to defend itself against the failures of Peter, ....”* [Eugene Petersen, [Little House on the Freeway](#), Tim Kimmel, pp. 191-192]

True success is not what the world thinks of you and what you have done, but what God thinks of you and what you have done.

The book of Joshua is a book of new beginnings for the people of God. Many of us here tonight have a weary sense of spiritual need for a new beginning.

Joshua had some very big shoes to fill. Joshua was facing one of the greatest crisis points of his life. He was not only facing the challenge of replacing Moses as the leader of the nation but also of actually leading the people into the promise land.

#### 1. God Prepares Those Whom He Calls (vv. 1-2)

*“After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: (2) “Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.”*

Joshua call to leadership may seem abrupt but God spent many years preparing Joshua for the new responsibilities of leadership. Joshua was born a slave in Egypt. We are told that he is the oldest son of a man named Nun of the tribe of Ephraim. The fact that Joshua was the first born meant that his

life had been in danger on the night of the Passover but that his family in faith had applied the blood to the door post of their home.

The first time we are introduced to Joshua was in Exodus 17:8, where he is picked by Moses lead the Israelites as they fought the Amalekites. Even then God was seasoning him, preparation for the many battles he would fight in the Promised Land. Here we read about him, “Now Amalek came and fought with Israel ... (9) And Moses said to Joshua, “Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.” (10) So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek....”

We next see Joshua in Exodus 24:12-13, “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.” (13) So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God.” Joshua is not the personal assistant to the leader of Israel, Moses.

In Numbers 13-14 we see that Joshua is one of the twelve spies sent into the land. You will remember that when the children of Israel first reached the border of the Promised Land that Moses sent in twelve spies to see what lay ahead. When the spies returned all agreed that land was indeed a land that flowed with milk and honey. But ten of the spies stated that it was useless to think that they could conquer it. Only Joshua and Caleb declared that the people could and should move on into the land. The people believed the majority report and the result was 40 years in the wilderness and a whole generation that did not inherit the promise.

After forty years in the wilderness, Moses as he was preparing to die asked God to give the people of Israel a leader and God told him that he had chosen Joshua. Deuteronomy 31:1-8 reveals, “Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. (2) And he said to them: “I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not cross over this Jordan.’ (3) The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the LORD has said. (4) And the LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. (5) The LORD will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. (6) Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” (7) Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. (8) And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”

We all face all kinds of obstacles in life and if we look at them negatively we will get discouraged and may decide not to follow through. But with God, we take life’s obstacles as challenges and overcome them through his strength. The obstacles that we overcome then become steppingstones for us, opportunities to experience God’s power and to grow in our faith.

*“I don’t know God’s plan for your life. Neither do you. But for all you know, He is training you and shaping you this very moment to step in and serve as pastor or an officer or as a board member or as a student body leader, to fill the shoes of someone who has done a bang-up job. Sure you’re different from*

*that person. But if God is calling you into that unenviable place of appointment, He can use you in a remarkable way.” [Charles Swindoll, Moses: Man of Selfless Dedication. Nashville: Word, 1999, p. 319]*

## 2. God Promises That He will be With Us vv. 3-6

Following the death of Moses Joshua faced one of the greatest challenges of his life. Although he knew that he was chosen by God to be the next leader, no doubt the reality of it all suddenly crashed in on him. Questions flooded his mind and anxiety and fear threatened to crush him. Could he handle so great a responsibility? What if the children of Israel should reject him as they had done to Moses so many times? Would they follow him? They had just spent 30 days in mourning over Moses’ death (Deut. 34:8). What if he failed? These and other questions filled his heart with dread.

The text beginning in verse three records that the Lord spoke to Joshua words of comfort and reassurance; *“Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. (4) From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. (5) No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. (6) Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.”*

Why did God make such an effort to reassure Joshua? Because he knows Joshua’s struggles. These are the kind of words that we want to hear when we are facing a huge obstacle in our lives. We want to know that God understands.

Well, God does understand! He knows what each of us is struggling with tonight. He affirms that he is present and the will not leave us not forsake us. But God also stresses something we need to take note of.

## 3. God Presents us with the Secret of Success

vv. 7-9

*“Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. (8) This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (9) Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”*

Joshua was primarily a soldier. In fact he was a brilliant soldier, one of the most extraordinary military commanders of all time. But as far as we can tell he may not have been a particularly exciting person. He was probably a bit of a plodder, a rather straight forward man who was chiefly concerned

with carrying the command given to him by God. His entire brilliant career was a rather straightforward story of simply setting one foot in front of another in quiet compliance with the commands of God.

Joshua was a very successful. He was successful because he paid attention when at the very beginning of his role as leader, God told him; **“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you, do not turn from it to the right or left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”** And that is exactly what Joshua did.

As I see it there are four parts to the formula for success.

In light of the excesses of the “prosperity preachers” of today we have to be careful to understand that “success” that Joshua was promised does not necessarily translate into prosperity. One may be successful in God’s eyes and not necessarily be prosperous in the eyes of the world. Material prosperity as defined by modern western society standards are not what is being promised here.

First, Joshua was to know God’s Word. Although not spelled out in so many words, every thing depended on Joshua knowing and studying the word of God. If law to be his guide in everything he did, and it was, then Joshua would have to know what the law said.

If you feel that God may be calling you into some sphere of service, the best thing that you can do is to prepare yourself by studying and seeking to know more about the word of God.

Secondly, Joshua was to talk about God’s Word. The text says in verse 8, **“this Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, ...”** Clearly, Joshua is called upon to include the word of God in his daily conversation. Including the word as he relates to his family, friends, neighbors and others who are a part of the nation.

In a society that asks Christians to be tolerant to all people of all beliefs, we are tolerated only in so much as we kept what we believe confined to Church on Sunday. Should you try to discuss God or your beliefs at the workplace you will quickly find out that our society is not very tolerant. But that is clearly, what Joshua is being advised to do. Make the word of God a part of your life everyday.

Third, Joshua was to meditate on God’s Word.

Next Joshua is told **“.... but you shall meditate in it day and night.”** Meditation is the next step beyond just knowing about and talking about the word of God. Meditation means to think about or contemplate how to apply the word in your life. Meditation has application as a goal. It is only when the word of God gets into our minds and affects our normal day to day decision making that we begin to act differently.

Finally, Joshua was to Obey God’s Word In Its Entirety. This is the last element and is the most important.

Joshua is told that not only is he to know, speak about, and meditate on the word, he was to obey it. God said,

“Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you, do not turn from it to the right or left, .., that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.” This may be the point at which much about our modern Christianity breaks down.

Most Christians know a lot more of the Bible than they are applying. It is not that we do not know what is right, it is that we do not do what is right.

## Conclusion

*“When James Garfield (later President of the U.S.) was principal of Hiram College in Ohio, a father asked him if the course of study could be simplified so that his son might be able to go through by a shorter route. “Certainly,” Garfield replied. “But it all depends on what you want to make of your boy. When God wants to make an oak tree, He takes a hundred years. When He wants to make a squash he requires only two months.*

*We are producing too many squashes and not enough oak trees in our day.”* [[www.sermonillustrated.com /a-z/s/success.html](http://www.sermonillustrated.com/a-z/s/success.html). Angus J MacQueen]

We have at least 50 million Christians in the United States alone. But we do not seem to have many Joshuas. We do not have many who, without trying to be novel or spectacular, determine to obey the law of God in every particular and then actually do obey it throughout a long lifetime of faithful service.

What is needed today is not increasingly clever methods, or increasingly clever people but obedience informed and motivated by the living and abiding Word of God.