

## **Basic Training for Leadership**

Joshua 1:1-2- “After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.’”

The book of Joshua begins by informing us that Israel is in the midst of two significant transitions. They are about to transition geographically from wandering in the wilderness to marching into the Promised Land. They are also in the midst of a transition from one leader to another. Moses is dead and Joshua has been selected by the LORD to lead God’s people into the Promised Land. Did God randomly pick Joshua and throw him right into the job without any prior preparation? Or Was there an extended period of training that preceded Joshua’s appointment as Israel’s leader?

We know from Joshua 1:1 that Joshua was Moses’ aide. In this position, he served alongside Moses for several years, eventually rising to the top as his right hand man and key military leader. Joshua didn’t become Israel’s leader overnight. His preparation for the task of was a process that took place over time.

Let’s consider together what was involved in Joshua’s basic training and the applications we can glean from his example for our lives today.

### **God used three key events to groom Joshua for leadership**

#### **Event #1- Joshua fights in Israel’s first battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16)**

##### **Read Exodus 17:8-16**

Before jumping into the details of this incident, let’s rehearse a little of Israel’s history. Under Moses’ leadership, God delivered Israel from slavery out of Egypt. After the Exodus from Egypt, God miraculously gave Israel safe passage across the Red Sea, ahead of the pursuing Egyptian army, which He destroyed. Given all God had done up to this point to secure Israel’s release from the Egyptians, the people should have been convinced to trust God and submit to Him forever, but sadly, this was not the case.

As Israel draws closer to Sinai, new tests of faith cause the people to doubt God and complain. They encounter bitter water. God graciously sweetens the water. They encounter a shortage of food. God graciously provides quail and manna for food. They face a water supply shortage. God graciously supplies, having Moses strike a rock from which water gushes forth. The forth test of faith Israel encounters on the way to Sinai is the attack of the Amalekites while they are camped at Rephidim.

In each of these tests, God works to teach the people of Israel that they can trust Him to meet their needs. He will fulfill His covenant promise to bless the nation with the Promised Land and in the process will meet the survival needs of the people. He will supply food and water. He will give Israel victory over her enemies.

The Amalekites, who are descendants of Esau's grandson (Genesis 36:12), attack Israel at Rephidim. Mind you, this is the first time Israel is engaged in battle. The nation has an untrained and inexperienced military. Moses instructs Joshua to choose some men and lead them into battle against the Amalekites. As Moses instructed:

### **Joshua leads God's army**

### **Joshua learns that victory comes only when God fights for Israel**

While Joshua and his men fight in the valley, the real battle is being fought elsewhere. Moses stands on the top of a hill overlooking the conflict with the staff of God in his hands. This staff serves as a reminder to Israel of how God has unleashed His power to deliver them in the past. There is nothing magical about it. The power isn't in it. The staff is an instrument through which God demonstrates His power.

Keil and Delitzsch write, "The lifting up of the staff secured to the warriors the strength needed to obtain the victory, from the fact that by means of the staff Moses brought down this strength from above, i.e. from the Almighty God in heaven."

This is the same instrument that Moses raised and stretched out over the Red Sea after which the waters parted so Israel could pass through it ahead of the Egyptian army. When this same staff was used to strike the rock, just prior to the Amalekites' attack, water gushed forth. In the battle against the Amalekites, when Moses holds the staff in his hands above his head, he acknowledges Israel's total dependence on God for victory, and Israel's military advances against the enemy.

During the battle, Moses' arms get tired and he begins to lower the staff. His lowering of the staff is a picture of the lack of dependence on God. When Moses does this, the enemy advances against Israel. When he raises it back up, Israel begins to win again. Recognizing the correlation between the raised staff and victory in battle, Aaron and Hur come to Moses' aid to help him keep the staff raised above his head which results in Joshua and his men overcoming the Amalekites with the sword.

This back and forth battle that changes in correlation to Israel's dependence on God or lack thereof clearly drives home the point: The battle is the LORD's.

## **Joshua learns that the battle is the LORD's and must be fought in full dependence on Him**

Success in battle will not come by sword alone, but can only be obtained by the power of God. Dependence on God results in victory. The lack of dependence on God results in defeat.

## **God reinforces the lesson of this battle by having it recorded and read to Joshua**

God orders that the story of what happened in the fight against the Amalekites be recorded so that it will be remembered. God also promises to blot out the memory of the Amalekites completely. Knowing more battles are ahead, generations of them in fact, God wants Israel to remember what He did for them in their first conflict with this group. God is particularly concerned that Joshua not forget. He holds Moses responsible to make sure Joshua hears what he writes down. God wants to strengthen Joshua's confidence in Him to help Israel against all her enemies.

### **God wants Joshua to remember He is able and can be trusted to deliver Israel**

### **God wants Joshua to know His plan to destroy the Amalekites—more battles are ahead**

Besides writing down what happened, Moses built an altar to memorialize the event. Moses names the altar he builds—"The LORD is my banner." The LORD is who Moses lifts up as his rallying point, as the center of his focus. Moses recognizes that the LORD is the One who gave victory as his hand was lifted up to God's throne in dependence on Him. Moses wants all succeeding generations of Israel to do as he did by waging war against Amalek with hands lifted to the LORD'S throne. Moses serves as a faithful example for Joshua to follow.

## **Event #2-Joshua accompanies Moses on the mountain (Exodus 24:12-18)**

### **Read Exodus 24:12-18**

In Exodus 19-24, God reveals the Law, His standard of conduct for His redeemed people. In chapters 19-20, Israel's covenant relationship with God is defined and summarized. God has chosen Israel to be His, bringing them out of Egypt and drawing them unto Himself. Therefore, they should respond by submitting to His authority over them and by obeying the regulations established in His covenant. Such conduct would set His people apart from the other nations of the world. If they live by His standards, God will bless them.

As God is defining His covenant relationship with Israel, the revelation of God's greatness frightens the people. They are warned to fear the LORD and not take Him lightly. Only certain people are allowed to approach the LORD and they must do so in a consecrated fashion. The mountain on which God's presence rests is set apart as holy with limits as to how close the people are allowed to come. Only certain chosen individuals are allowed to get an up close look at the presence of God.

In Exodus 24, the Mosaic covenant God made with Israel is ratified and confirmed. After the summary of the law is given, a formal dedication service is celebrated. During this celebration, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel see the God of Israel. Moses provides the following description in Exodus 24:10- “Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.” The sight is grand and awesome and yet this was only the view from under God’s feet. Imagine how spectacular a closer view would be.

Following the dedication service, Moses and Joshua go up onto the mountain for forty days where God gives Moses His commands. God had given these to Moses earlier, but now they are inscribed in stone. Only Joshua accompanies Moses on the mountain. No one else is allowed near. Joshua’s role is becoming increasingly more prominent.

We know from Exodus 24:1 that only Moses is to approach the LORD. We are not told how close Joshua is allowed to get. We don’t know what Joshua did these forty days. However, we do know that Joshua’s exposure to God’s presence is second only to Moses’. He has a “front-row seat” and is allowed a special opportunity to observe what happens on the mountain with a closer view of God than anyone, besides Moses of course.

### **Joshua observes up close the power and presence of God**

How do you suppose this time would have impacted Joshua’s life and leadership later?

### **Event #3- Joshua stays at the Tent of Meeting (33:7-11)**

#### **Read Exodus 33:7-11**

The Tent of Meeting was set up outside the camp for God to meet with men until the Tabernacle was built. It was a tent outside the camp. At this time in Israel’s history, when people wanted to know God’s will, they would go to this tent to meet with Him. When Moses went to the Tent of Meeting, his visit was unique. Everyone knew when he was there. A pillar of cloud would come down serving as a visible demonstration of God’s presence with Moses. When this would take place, all the people would respond by worshipping at the entrance to their tents. At the Tent of Meeting, the LORD would speak to Moses face to face. That is not to say that Moses saw the face of God (No one could actually see the face of God Exodus 33:20). Rather the face to face reference is a figurative expression of openness, closeness, and friendship. When Moses would meet with the LORD in this way, Joshua is close by- “Then Moses would return to camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.”

### **Joshua observes the conversations between God and Moses**

When Moses goes back to the camp, returning to life as usual with the people, Joshua stays behind. The Bible does not tell us why exactly Joshua stays at the Tent of Meeting. This we do know.

## **Joshua's practice is to stay close to the place where God meets with His people**

Joshua intentionally spends considerable time at the place where people go to inquire of the LORD, the place where God meets His people, the place that serves as the reminder of God's presence with His people. I can't prove it, because the Bible doesn't give us specifics, but I am inclined to believe that Joshua's observation of Moses' conversations with God is the basis for his own desire for that kind of relationship with God and his reason for spending more time at the tent of meeting.

Certainly the words of assurance God would give Joshua later—"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you" meant a lot to Joshua considering all the opportunities he had to see up close what this kind of relationship with God looked like.

After examining these passages and observing Joshua's preparation to lead the people of God, what does God desire for us as His people today?

### **Application for us today:**

#### **It takes time to develop maturity for leadership**

Deuteronomy 34:10-12 says about Moses, "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."

Joshua had very big sandals to fill. He needed years of preparation before he would be ready to take Moses' place. Even today, being recognized as a leader doesn't take place overnight. It takes time to mature and develop before a person is ready to assume leadership. As Paul tells Timothy, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22).

#### **Greater opportunity to serve God tomorrow requires faithfulness with the ministry He gives us today**

Over the years, Joshua proved himself faithful both to the LORD in keeping His commandments and to Moses as God's appointed leader. His demonstration of faithfulness led to his being recognized as Israel's next leader.

Do you desire to have greater opportunity to serve God in the future? If so, be faithful with what God has given you to do today. If so, be available to serve under the current leadership. If so, be teachable, allowing those who have more experience walking with God to mentor and help you mature.

## **Understand the balance between God's Sovereign control and our responsibility**

In Israel's battle with the Amalekites, Joshua realizes that God is fighting this battle for them. He learns the critical importance of depending on God for victory. Even so, Joshua has to lead his men in standing before the enemy eyeball to eyeball and fighting them with the sword. God's sovereignty and power, demonstrated here by His giving Israel victory unites with Joshua's responsibility to wage war against the enemy. The balance presented by this example protects us from two extremes as we understand and apply it. One extreme is to let go and let God. In this case, God does everything and we just sit back and watch Him do His thing. The other extreme is to try to do all the work for God and leave Him out, failing to depend on Him.

The balance is to realize both that God gives the victory through the exercise of His power and He holds us responsible to fight in the battle using us as His instruments to accomplish His purposes.

The apostle Paul recognized well this need for balance. Paul understood his responsibility- "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor..." Paul also understood that he must depend on God and the exercise of His sovereign power if he is to carry out this responsibility- "struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." (See Colossians 1:28-29)

## **Moses lifted up the staff, we need to lift up our prayers**

As we observed earlier, the staff served as a symbol of God's powerful involvement on Israel's behalf. Moses' lifting it up signified dependence on God. Today, we don't lift up staffs in acknowledgment of our dependence on God. Instead, we lift up prayers to God to express our dependence upon Him and to appeal for Him to be personally and powerfully involved in our life and in our church. The Apostle Paul's expressed desire for the church was this- "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer" (1 Timothy 2:8). Just as there was a back and forth advantage in battle related to Moses' lifting and not lifting up the staff, so the same correlation between our victory or lack thereof exists depending on whether we pray or fail to pray. Friends, where does the battle stand today?

## **Time spent with God, reflecting on His power and presence, is critical preparation for leadership and ministry**

It is Joshua's confidence in God's presence and His power which he had the opportunity to observe up close on the mountain and at the Tent of Meeting that later enables him to lead Israel with strength and courage. Though we are not able to see physically God's power and presence in the same way Joshua did, just the same, we too have the tremendous privilege of observing God's power up close as we spend time meeting with Him, meditating on His Word.

We have the revelation of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. As we read of Christ's life and ministry, we observe incredible displays of power over demons, power over disease, power over nature, power over death itself. As we meet with God and meditate on His Word, we are reminded by the apostle Paul that the same power God exerted when He raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand is for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-20). When we spend time meeting with God by reading His Word, it is then and only then that we are prepared to minister and lead in a strong and courageous manner.

Like Joshua, we have a daunting task. That task is to "make disciples of all nations." What is our job description? Reach the world, that's all! Just as God's power and presence was available to Joshua to enable him to proceed with his responsibilities in strength and courage, so His power and presence is available for us today.

Quote Matthew 28:18-20

God would have us to face our challenge of reaching the world with the same courage and strength Joshua later exhibits in his leadership of Israel. This courage and confidence will only be ours when we make a point of meeting with God in the pages of Holy Scripture, allowing Him to remind us of what He can powerfully do on our behalf as we depend on Him.