

OUR STORY

GOD'S WORK. OUR HOPE.

Chronological Readings

March



NORTH FORT WORTH
2011

PRACTICAL APPROACH TO OUR DAILY READINGS

Commit to a consistent time and place (allow 15-20 minutes).

Read each day's passage prayerfully. Don't ask the question, "What does today's reading mean to me?" Read each day, asking, "What truth is God revealing?" Focus especially upon:

What does the reading reveal about God?

What does the reading reveal about humanity (about me)?

What does the reading reveal about what is "relationally" appropriate or inappropriate toward God? God isn't supplying us with a list of rules to follow.

He's inviting us to relate to Him as God so we might walk with Him by faith.

What does the reading reveal about God's unfolding work of salvation?

Underline what stands out. We want to remember key ideas or verses.

Prayerfully identify one promise, insight, or action to carry with you into the day, and then commit it to the Lord in prayer.

Read each day's devotion for further perspective.

Keep in mind—the goal is NOT to read the Bible thru. The DAILY COMMITMENT is to draw near to God by faith and to experience the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

ENLIST A PERSON OR GROUP TO JOIN YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Agree to hold one another accountable.

Touch base consistently about your readings.

Exchange daily texts, emails, or social media posts to highlight the promise, insight, or action you seek to carry into the day.

Talk weekly or every other week by phone or in person. Discuss specific lessons or questions that especially stand out.

Adopt an approach that works best for you—consistency is the key.

Pray for one another by name for spiritual understanding and growth.

Encourage one another to press through the ups and downs of the journey.

March 1

Numbers 6:1-27; Numbers 10:1-36

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing: ‘May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you His favor and give you His peace.’ Whenever Aaron and his sons bless the people of Israel in My name, I Myself will bless them,” (Numbers 6:22-27)

The Aaronic blessing is familiar to many. We find the text on wall hangings, refrigerator magnets, and various decorative pieces. The words are frequently voiced at the close of special ceremonies or times of worship. The blessing itself is filled with hope and God’s good intentions on behalf of His people. Though familiar, do we appreciate what it conveys?

It reminds us that God is the true source of blessing and life. How often do we lose sight of this? How frequently do we set our hearts on pursuits other than God, only to discover that we have been deceived or mistaken? It is the LORD who blesses and protects. The LORD brings goodness, favor, and peace into our lives—may we then seek His face.

The prescribed blessing also highlights the necessity of faith on the people’s part. Though God intends to bless the people, Aaron, and his sons must verbalize the words in His name. Three times, the name of the LORD is invoked. Each time, God’s role as their provider is acknowledged. Each time, God extends the promise of blessing. Don’t overlook the connection. God’s provision is not presumed. A faith acknowledgment is required. Think about that in terms of our response to God. It’s one thing for us to admit that God is the true source of life. It is something else for us to verbalize our dependence on Him in prayer. It is by voicing the request that our faith is expressed.

Here’s an encouraging thought. The name we invoke is the name of Jesus, God’s Son. In the name of Jesus, we ask for God’s blessing and protection. In the name of Jesus, we seek the joy of God’s presence and the sufficiency of His grace. Yes, in the name of Jesus, we don’t presume upon God’s favor and peace. We ask for it in the holy name of Jesus. Is this something you are willing to do? Choose to do so even now by faith. May God lift our hearts as we do.

Consider again Aaron’s blessing with our relationship with Jesus in view, *“May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you His favor and give you His peace.”*

March 2

Numbers 11-13

Soon the people began to complain about their hardship, and the LORD heard everything they said. Then the LORD's anger blazed against them, and He sent a fire to rage among them, and He destroyed some of the people in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people screamed to Moses for help, and when he prayed to the LORD, the fire stopped. After that, the area was known as Taberah (which means "the place of burning"), because fire from the LORD had burned among them there. (Numbers 11:1-3)

Complaints, complaints, and more complaints. How quickly God's redeemed people lose sight of God's provision and care. They display very little faith and a great deal of selfish preoccupation. With the manifested presence of God leading their way, the people express dissatisfaction instead of gratitude and trust. It is hard to believe they are so short-sighted. But then again, how often do we reflect the same? How easily do we fall into the "what have you done for me lately" mindset? I fear it is far too familiar.

Of course, with the children of Israel, it would prove costly. They stretch God's patience and mercy one step too far. Let's not forget their idolatrous rebellion while Moses was on the mountain. You would think the people would follow the LORD's leadership humbly and contritely. It appears otherwise. Again and again, they voice their displeasure and suffer accordingly. Even Aaron and Miriam join in the criticism and discover the error of their ways.

And the lesson? Maybe complaining is not such a good idea. Even in the New Testament, we are discouraged from making this mistake. Paul writes, *"Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people."* (Philippians 2:14-15)

Does this mean we can't express our disappointment or concern? No, certainly not. God invites us to approach Him honestly, acknowledging our sources of anxiety and lifting everything to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6-7). The difference is attitude. Do we come to God as God, humbly seeking His help? Or, like in our reading today, do we dishonor Him as God, voicing our complaints like spoiled, temperamental children? I recommend the humble approach. And you?

March 3

Numbers 14-15

Two of the men who had explored the land, Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, tore their clothing. They said to all the people of Israel, “The land we traveled through and explored is a wonderful land! And if the LORD is pleased with us, He will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey. Do not rebel against the LORD, and don’t be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the LORD is with us! Don’t be afraid of them!” (Numbers 14:6–9)

God directs Moses to send representatives from each tribe to spy out the land of promise. Twelve leaders are set apart to explore the possibilities of what God has in store. Unfortunately, ten of the twelve focus more on the land’s obstacles than fruitfulness. They fixate on their would-be enemies instead of marveling over the goodness of God’s provision. They come back fearful and defeated when they should have returned eager and excited. Why so gloomy? They lack faith in the God who delivered them and promised their future victory.

Thankfully, two of the twelve, Joshua and Caleb, refuse to close their eyes to the possibilities. They testify to the land’s bounty and plead for God’s people to step forward in faith. *“If the LORD is pleased with us,” they appeal, “He will bring us safely into that land and give it to us.” (Numbers 14:8)* They call for the people to reject their fear and to anticipate God’s provision. However, the people are not swayed. They rebel against the LORD and turn away from what could be.

It is yet another disappointing episode in the life of God’s chosen people. Once again, the people stopped short of what should be—what could be. And the issue? They refuse to trust the LORD. It makes you wonder what more God could have done to prove His faithfulness. The LORD rescues them from the Egyptians. He sustains them in the wilderness despite their complaining, and now He is physically manifesting His glory before them as He leads them dramatically forward. And their response? They reject His promise and turn away.

So what do we learn? I’m reminded that faith is not a feeling. It’s a decision to accept and act upon God’s promise. It’s to envision the future based upon the assurance of God’s Word, not our fears. The people had an opportunity to trust the LORD, and they turned away.

And us? I don’t know what the future holds, but God has promised to make the necessary difference through Jesus, His Son. More often than not, the promise is not to eliminate life’s problems but to demonstrate His faithfulness and bring us through the situations—one step at a time. With Jesus leading the way, we should step forward confidently and expectantly. Jesus guarantees our present and our future. Will we trust Him?

March 4

Numbers 16-18

One day Korah son of Izhar, a descendant of Kohath son of Levi, conspired with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben. They incited a rebellion against Moses, along with 250 other leaders of the community, all prominent members of the assembly. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Numbers 16:1-3)

What is our posture when life appears to go from bad to worse? Do we stand defiantly? Do we turn to walk away? Do we humble ourselves before God and others? How do we respond? Moses’ situation has noticeably shifted from bad to worse. It is bad enough that the children of Israel rejected God’s plan to enter the land of promise. Even then, Moses intercedes on the people’s behalf. Moses is a tireless leader.

Yet, despite Moses’ faithfulness, he is confronted with a religious and political coup. Korah of the tribe of Levi and Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben publicly challenged Moses’ and Aaron’s authority. They organize an uprising among the people. And Moses’ response?

“When Moses heard what they were saying, he fell face down on the ground. Then he said to Korah and his followers, ‘Tomorrow morning the LORD will show us who belongs to Him and who is holy.’” (Numbers 16:4-5)

Moses’ actions reveal a great deal about God’s servant. Instead of standing defiantly against the people or turning to walk away, Moses humbles himself before the LORD. He places the situation in God’s hands and invites others to do the same. We shouldn’t be surprised by Moses’ response. He is described as the most humble of individuals (Numbers 12:3), which says a great deal. Moses did not allow his position or authority to go to his head. Could we have said the same?

Of course, the rest of the story validates Moses’ approach. God elevates Moses and Aaron in the eyes of the people and, at the same time, judges those who would defy His appointed leaders. The episode reminds us to walk humbly before God and entrust our lives to His hands. Let’s keep that in mind as we move into the day.

March 5

Numbers 19-21

Then the LORD told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!" So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!" (Numbers 21:8-9)

We could reflect upon many things from today's reading. Moses' striking the rock in anger stands out. If you're like me, you might think that Moses should have been granted some leeway from the LORD. Yet, at the same time, it illustrates the necessity for God's appointed leaders to submit to His leadership, even when their emotions get the best of them. Obedience to the LORD's command is essential to effective leadership.

However, my primary focus for the day is on the scene involving the bronze serpent. We again find the children of Israel impatient and voicing their displeasure. They speak out against God and His servant Moses. Their complaint sounds too familiar, *"Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" (Numbers 21:5)* Once again, the people refuse to trust the LORD, dishonoring Him with their words. Their actions provoke the Lord, and they suffer severely. Poisonous snakes entered the camp. Many began to die.

The people recognized the source of the problem and promptly turned to Moses. *"We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes."* (Numbers 21:7) God's decision is unexpected. Instead of removing the serpents, God offers an unusual solution. The LORD instructs Moses to fashion a bronze serpent, attach it to a pole, and place it within the camp. God then extends a promise. If the poisonous snakes bite anyone, God will heal them as they fix their eyes upon the bronze serpent. Think about that. Their problem arose because of a lack of faith. Their deliverance from God's judgment would now require active faith.

Jesus uses this same story as an illustration of our salvation. He explains, *"And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life."* (John 3:14-15) Do you see the practical connection? We, too, face judgment because of our sins. And the LORD's solution? God places His Son on a pole (the cross) to provide the way to salvation. Do note: God's solution requires faith on the part of the individual. Jesus adds, *"For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

Have you lifted your eyes of faith to the One who saves? If so, give thanks for the gift of life you have received. If blessed in this way, do you know someone who has yet to respond? Take a few moments and pray for them by name. Ask the LORD to work through you and others to lead them to the One who saves—Jesus, the Son of God. May we continue to lift them in prayer until we see them graciously delivered. May it be soon, O LORD. May it be soon!

March 6

Numbers 22-24

Balaam concluded his messages by saying:

“Alas, who can survive unless God has willed it?” (Numbers 24:23)

The story of Balaam is one of the more unusual accounts in the Old Testament. It involves a foreign ruler (Balak) who enlists a pagan soothsayer (Balaam) to curse God’s chosen people (the children of Israel). It includes Balaam being instructed by the LORD and being protected by a donkey who speaks. Finally, Balaam pronounces a series of blessings that affirm God’s good intentions for the children of Israel.

Admittedly, the talking donkey is what often attracts the most attention. I smile at God’s flair for the unexpected. I’m also encouraged to know that if God makes it possible for a donkey to communicate, He can effectively enable anything to deliver His message—including me. Of course, the novelty of a talking donkey is a minor detail in the story. From my perspective, two helpful lessons emerge.

First, it’s foolish to act contrary to God’s will. We know that, right? In the story, Balaam embodies a worldly mindset. If he had his way, he would have cursed the children of Israel and profited from it. The New Testament describes Balaam as someone who loves unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15). Generally speaking, he’s not a good guy, even with a talking donkey. Nevertheless, Balaam learns that defying Israel’s God is not in his best interest. He acknowledges his sin, submits to God’s purpose, and ultimately becomes an instrument of God’s blessing. I wonder. Have we learned the same?

However, it’s the second lesson that especially encourages my heart. An unbelieving world cannot stop God’s good intentions for His people. Mind you. We can make a mess of it at times, but the opponents of the LORD are helpless in halting God’s grace and blessing. They can scheme all they want, but God’s purposes will ultimately be fulfilled. An encouraging thought?

This episode reminds me of Paul’s statement, *“If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (Romans 8:31)* That doesn’t imply that we’ll not have our share of hardships or struggles. Read the passage surrounding Paul’s statement in Romans 8, and you’ll know that difficulties will come. The point is this: we are more than conquerors if God is on our side (Romans 8:37). And here’s the good news, “God is on our side.”

So, let’s step back from Balaam’s story and carry these lessons into the day. It will do us all some good.

March 7

Numbers 25-26

So these are the results of the registration of the people of Israel as conducted by Moses and Eleazar the priest on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan River, across from Jericho. Not one person on this list had been among those listed in the previous registration taken by Moses and Aaron in the wilderness of Sinai. (Numbers 26:63-64)

The LORD directs Moses and Eleazar to conduct a second census among the people. Much has happened since the people were initially counted at Sinai (Numbers 1). The people departed from the mountain filled with so much expectation. Led by God, they were heading to the land of promise. What could go wrong? We know what went wrong. They focused more on their obstacles than God's provision. They fixated more on their inadequacy instead of trusting in God's sufficiency. What about us? How often do we reflect the same?

Their lack of faith proves costly. The generation who doubted God would spend the remainder of their lives wandering in the wilderness, outside of where God intended them to be. That said, they would still benefit from God's leadership and provision. That is ironic if you think about it. Though this group had refused to enter the promised land because they doubted God's ability, they would spend the remainder of their days dependent upon God's daily provision and care. There's a message of hope in that. God's grace can make a difference even when God's people falter. Even when we stop short of what could have been, God still seeks to make a difference if we follow His lead.

Of course, the purpose of the second census is more about the future than the past. It's time for the children of the "doubting" generation to step forward and experience what God always intended. Moses and Eleazar number them as a testimony to God's sustaining grace. Interestingly, the total number of men is slightly less than the previous generation. God now positions His people to move toward a promising future despite the wilderness' challenges and losses. God has proven faithful. God will lead them forward.

Consider the implications of this for our lives. God is faithful whether we are dealing with the consequences of our past mistakes or stepping forward with God toward a new beginning. God desires to lead His people and make the crucial difference. Do we understand this? Will we acknowledge God's sustaining presence for the day ahead? Will we trust Him enough to follow His lead? I say, "Yes." And you?

March 8

Numbers 27-29

The LORD replied, “Take Joshua son of Nun, who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him. Present him to Eleazar the priest before the whole community, and publicly commission him to lead the people.” (Numbers 27:18-19)

How does one choose a leader, especially one responsible for leading a significant number of people? Is it based on popularity, giftedness, or personal resources? Or should our attention be directed elsewhere? Our reading today answers that question regarding the children of Israel as God commands Moses to appoint his successor. And who is that person? God singles out Moses' protégé, Joshua. What can we learn from this process?

It is worth noting that Joshua has demonstrated his faithfulness to the LORD over a long period. His service is in no way short-lived. He's been steady and dependable in so many circumstances and situations. For example, Joshua stands with Moses when the people defile themselves by worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32). Joshua also points to God's power and provision when the majority refuses to enter the promised land (Numbers 14). Joshua will not be intimidated into silence. Again and again, he demonstrates a pattern of consistency and spiritual credibility. Joshua's trust and dependence upon the LORD are not temperamental displays. His faith has been proven and tested.

And that's what's interesting. Of all the things that might be said about Joshua, God's recommendation of Joshua is brief and to the point. *“Take Joshua son of Nun, who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him.”* This in no way negates all that has been stated. In some way, it may explain it. According to the LORD, what is most important for their future leader is that Joshua inwardly possesses God's Spirit. His success, and the people's future success, will not rest upon Joshua—the person. Their future would depend upon God's activity in and through Joshua's life. God's Spirit is crucial. Do we understand the importance of this within the church? Do we value the same?

I fear that sometimes we focus more on the world's criteria regarding Christian leadership than the LORD's. We are too easily influenced by a person's popularity, giftedness, or personal resources instead of the recognizable influence of God's Spirit. And, **honestly, we suffer because** of it. May God help us learn from Joshua's example and teach us to elevate what God holds essential. May we seek those who reflect God's presence within and allow Him to make the difference.

March 9

Numbers 30-31

Then the LORD said to Moses, "On behalf of the people of Israel, take revenge on the Midianites for leading them into idolatry. After that, you will die and join your ancestors." So Moses said to the people, "Choose some men, and arm them to fight the LORD's war of revenge against Midian." (Numbers 31:1-3)

If you had a choice, how would you conclude a lifetime of service to the LORD? An enjoyable reception or two? A few public speaking engagements? Maybe a simple, non-stressful act of service? I doubt it would in any way compare with Moses' final assignment. As Moses' life draws to a close, God calls for His servant to become an instrument of His judgment against the people of Midian.

Why take such action? If you recall, the Midianites (advised by Balaam) lure God's people into moral and spiritual compromise (Numbers 25). Many of the men of Israel openly worship the pagan God, Baal, in pursuit of sexual gratification with the Midianite women. God's people defile themselves, and twenty-four thousand Israelites die as a result. The consequence of their spiritual infidelity is terrible and ugly. The time, however, has now come for God to judge the instigators of the offense. God demanded vengeance against the people of Midian.

Can we agree that every expression of God's judgment in Scripture is unsettling? We should never grow comfortable with displays of God's justice and retribution. The heart should be dismayed. It should remind us of the seriousness of sin in the eyes of a holy God. Even so, consider leading God's people to be the instrument of God's wrath. That is Moses' final assignment. God directs him to mobilize the army, and Moses faithfully obeys.

Why highlight this action? I suppose it would be easier to look beyond the story. We don't like to dwell on examples of God's judgment. But let's look at it in all its horror and remind ourselves that Jesus, the Son of God, bore our judgment for sin on the cross. He suffered immeasurably for our sake so that we might be forgiven and made whole (2 Corinthians 5:21). Think about that and give thanks.

Also, consider the example of Moses at the end of his life. The aging servant of God yields himself to lead the people of God in a way that no one would prefer. He will prove devoted, not perfect, but faithful to the end. Reflect on Moses' example and consider your response to the LORD.

March 10

Numbers 32-33

At the LORD's direction, Moses kept a written record of their progress. These are the stages of their march, identified by the different places where they stopped along the way. (Numbers 33:2)

God asks Moses to keep a journal of the people's roadmap to the land of promise. There's a benefit in recalling their many stops. A story might be told and remembered with each entry—good and bad. Of course, their journey begins dramatically with their deliverance from Egypt. An enslaved people are set free to follow God's leadership to a better place and life. Their path would include a trail across the Red Sea on dry land. Who would have charted that as a possibility? Other destinations would also remind God's people of His faithfulness. At Rephidim, God miraculously supplies water from a rock. He teaches His people—you can trust in Me. At Sinai, their eyes are opened to the possibility of a covenant relationship with their Redeemer and LORD. They would draw near Him in ways the people had never known. Good stops. Good memories.

The journal entries would likewise remind Moses of the people's regrets along the way. The wilderness of Sinai would highlight both—the privilege of drawing near and the shame of turning away. At Kibroth-hattaavah, the children of Israel express doubt in God's concern and provision, suffering the consequences (Numbers 11). Regrettably, their refusal to trust the LORD would characterize many stops along the way. Indeed, they would experience quite a few regrets if they retraced their path. And us? God commands Moses to keep a record of their progress, to remember their journey. Do you think it would be helpful for us to do the same? Not so much focusing upon places that you physically lived, but critical points along the way where you learned a lesson of faith—perhaps good and bad.

For example, start with how your journey began. When did you experience God's deliverance in Jesus? What led to your response to Him? Also, consider two high points in your spiritual journey—points that God opened your spiritual eyes further to His activity and grace. Identify also two spiritual low points where you faltered or failed. It's helpful to remember and draw the appropriate lessons. Moses' journal included the place where his brother Aaron died. What place or experience might you remember where you discovered God's comfort and support? We all have such times and places to remember.

There's value in remembering. Though our roadmap may not be as detailed as Moses', take a few moments and reflect. Give God a few minutes to refocus your heart. May our faith and confidence in the LORD be strengthened as we do.

March 11

Numbers 34-36

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Give these instructions to the Israelites: When you come into the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your special possession, these will be the boundaries.” (Numbers 34:1-2)

God lays out a vision of what should be. God defines the future boundaries before the children of Israel cross into the land. From the north to the south to the east and the west, God explains what could be if the people trust Him and follow His leadership. The land is there to be possessed. But will they do it? The answer is “no.” Though much of the defined territory would come under Israel’s control, the twelve tribes would stop short of establishing the promised boundaries. Large tracts of land will remain unsecured. The people will settle for less than God intended.

Let’s reflect upon that further. The boundaries of God’s blessing are clearly defined. He guarantees their success as they follow His lead. He promises their victory as they step forward with Him, trusting in His provision. So why would they choose to stop short? Did they grow content with their early conquests? Did they become weary of the struggle? Why settle for less? We’ll read about their future actions in the Book of Joshua. However, for now, let’s think about what could have been—what should have been.

Why the emphasis? As Jesus’ disciples, God also defines the boundaries of His blessing on our behalf. Granted, His promises to us are not geographical. His promises to us are transformational. God promises to affect our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus so that we might reflect His character and nature. The Apostle Paul explains, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)* That said, to experience the “new” most fully involves a series of actions on our part. It’s not spiritually instantaneous. Like the children of Israel, we must actively follow God’s lead and claim the ground that He promises. Are we doing so? Why would we settle for less?

Perhaps we’re unfamiliar with the moral and spiritual ground we should claim as we abide in Jesus. Maybe we’ve grown content with our early successes. Why stretch ourselves beyond our comfort zone? Or, perhaps we’ve grown weary of the struggle? Let’s admit **that spiritual growth or transformation can sometimes be a battle. Seldom do we reject the influence of our sinful nature without a fight. It’s much easier to go along with the world and our natural desires than to follow Jesus. Yet, if true life is what we seek, we should say “yes” to Jesus and “no” to ourselves.**

So, let’s ask the LORD to open our spiritual eyes to the promised boundaries before us. Let’s also commit to following God’s lead into the day and claim the spiritual ground that should be taken. Indeed, may it not be said of us today, “we settled for less.”

March 12

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:20

Then King Sihon declared war on us and mobilized his forces at Jahaz. But the LORD our God handed him over to us, and we crushed him, his sons, and all his people ... The LORD our God also helped us conquer Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Gorge, and the town in the gorge, and the whole area as far as Gilead. No town had walls too strong for us. (Deuteronomy 2:32–33)

The battle is the LORD's. That's not always an easy lesson to learn. If we are honest, we are prone to two extremes. We either push God into a spectator role—attempting the battle ourselves. Or, we adopt a passive role—expecting the LORD to give us a victory without our direct involvement. It becomes all about God or all about us when it is intended to be God at work through us, not without us.

The battle is the LORD's. God seeks to impress this lesson upon the hearts of a new generation of His followers. The LORD reminds them how He has given them their past victories and will lead them to greater success as they step toward the future with Him. The key is to discover the proper disposition of heart. They must trust the LORD enough to follow His leadership and anticipate His provision as they enter the battle. Sounds easy enough, but we know that's not true. Pride, selfishness, sin, and doubt frequently interfere with God's plan and provision. That was true of the children of Israel, and it is true with us.

The battle is the LORD's. Let's renew our focus for the day ahead. Let's confess our dependence on the LORD and commit to His leadership. Come on! Let's move into the day, anticipating His provision and work. Once again, don't push God into a spectator role nor expect His activity without your involvement. May we realize instead that we will share in God's activity and discover His sufficiency as we join Him in the task. Consider some additional verses from Deuteronomy and be reassured.

Do not be afraid of the nations there, for the LORD your God will fight for you. (Deuteronomy 3:22)

When you go out to fight your enemies and you face horses and chariots and an army greater than your own, do not be afraid. The LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, is with you! (Deuteronomy 20:1)

For the LORD your God is going with you! He will fight for you against your enemies, and He will give you victory! (Deuteronomy 20:4)

So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

The battle is the LORD's. Do we believe it? Will we step forward with Him?

March 13

Deuteronomy 3:21-5:33

So Moses told the people, “You must be careful to obey all the commands of the LORD your God, following His instructions in every detail. Stay on the path that the LORD your God has commanded you to follow. Then you will live long and prosperous lives in the land you are about to enter and occupy.” (Deuteronomy 5:32–33)

How important is one’s obedience to God? Moses would attest, “It is vitally important.” Moses disregarded the LORD at one critical point, which would cost him dearly. God promised to make water miraculously flow from a rock if His servant would only speak to it. Sadly, Moses allowed his emotions and pride to get the best of him. Instead of obeying the LORD’s command, Moses physically struck the rock with his staff—not once but twice. God still provided water for His people. Moses, however, forfeited his opportunity to enter the land of promise. What a painful mistake!

Moses appealed to the LORD for a second chance (Deuteronomy 3:24-25). Though God forgave Moses’ disobedience, the consequence of his sin remained. He still could not join God’s people as they crossed into the land. We can argue over whether this is fair on God’s part. Yet, it’s the lesson that’s key—our obedience matters. God’s commands are not optional. He expects His people to follow His lead for their benefit. This is especially true for God’s leaders.

That explains Moses’ passionate appeal, “*Stay on the path that the LORD your God has commanded you to follow.*” From experience, Moses doesn’t want anyone else to miss out on what could be. Nor does the LORD. Keep this in mind. Our obedience doesn’t earn the desired benefit. It simply places us in proximity with the One who provides. Sin disrupts fellowship, which hinders God’s activity. In contrast, obedience enables us to walk with the God who provides so we might experience His continuing grace and power. Get the idea?

Take heart. Our future hope in heaven rests upon Jesus’ perfect work on our behalf. Disobedience doesn’t disqualify us—praise Jesus’ name. That said, daily obedience positions us to experience even more of God’s presence and activity on this side of heaven—so it’s worth the time and effort. So, how important is one’s obedience to God? Moses testifies, “Vitally important!” And we agree?

March 14

Deuteronomy 6-9

Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

God desired a relationship with humanity from the very beginning. The Creator fashioned us in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), so we might know Him and relate to Him as God. As we know Him, He also expects us to trust and actively love Him. Sadly, much of human history has demonstrated otherwise. Too many descendants of Adam and Eve turned away from God, rejecting the privileged relationship He desired. God's covenant with the children of Israel appears to be a relational reset of sorts. God provides a way of forgiveness, a place of fellowship, and wisdom for life, allowing the Israelites to rediscover the joy of relating to God, their Creator.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 serves as foundational verses for God's redeemed people. They are to relate to God as God and (as God commands) love Him for who He is. Keep this in mind. Loving the LORD with all of one's heart, soul, and strength is more than a warm emotion or feeling. Instead, it is an appeal to respond to God with the whole of one's being. It's more of a determination of the will than a spontaneous stirring within—which makes sense. You can't command an emotion. Feelings will rise and fall, often influenced by our circumstances. However, you can command one's action or priority. That is the message of these notable verses. God directs us to relate to Him as God—choosing to turn to Him, trust in Him, and respond to Him with the whole of who we are.

Jesus later states that loving God with all we are is the most important command in all of the Law, adding a second, *"to love your neighbor as yourself."* (Mark 12:29-31) Again, keep in mind that this is not about an emotional response. It is descriptive of a determined response. You choose to relate to God for who He is—trusting, following, honoring, serving, and enjoying the possibility of fellowship with Him. As the verses explain, we must *"love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, and strength."* It is a decision of the will, not a temperamental emotion within. The truth is the more we relate to God in this way, the more we will know and experience Him. And, the more we know and experience Him, the more we will reflect the human emotion we often call love.

So, how will we approach the LORD into the day ahead? I recommend that we love Him with all we are. And you?

March 15

Deuteronomy 10-12

So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors. (Deuteronomy 11:18–21)

God calls for His people to teach their children about faith and conduct. They are not to leave it to chance, hoping the children figure it out. Instead, they are to talk about their faith so that future generations might experience a relationship with the LORD. They are to discuss it at home, on the road, and when they get up or go to bed. In other words, families are to talk about their faith as they share life. It's not so much scheduled as it is incorporated into everyday experiences.

Do we understand the importance of this? I fear that some have adopted the opposite approach. They have bought into the idea that children should develop their conclusions about faith and religion without being influenced. I agree that each child must ultimately decide for themselves. That said, it's the parent's responsibility to make such a decision possible. If we neglect to reveal the truth about God and model a life of faith, the likelihood is that our children will fill their lives with something other than God. How can children embrace something that they do not know or understand? God calls for parents and grandparents to be practical. We are to look for natural opportunities to discuss our faith and the difference God makes.

The good news is abundant resources are available to help us with this task. Age-appropriate materials are available at church, online, and in print to encourage and guide our faith discussions. The bad news is that just as many misleading resources and cultural influences are present to deceive and confuse the young. If we leave it to our children to distinguish the true from the false, it's like abandoning a young child to cross a busy street alone. Hoping they cross safely is just not enough. God would say, "Teach your children. Talk to them." Yes, the day will come when they make decisions on their own, but for now, lead them down a path of faith and pray that they continue to walk it.

March 16

Deuteronomy 13:1-16:17

You must set aside a tithe of your crops—one-tenth of all the crops you harvest each year. Bring this tithe to the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for His name to be honored—and eat it there in His presence. This applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn males of your flocks and herds. Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 14:22–23)

God commands His people to honor Him each year with a tithe, a tenth of what He places in their hands. It would serve two important purposes. First, it would support the ministry of the Tabernacle and later the Temple. Their consistent gifts to the LORD would sustain the Levites who serve on the people's behalf, but it would also support those with a particular need—the foreigners, the orphans, and widows.

Second, perhaps even more critically, it would promote faith and reliance upon the LORD. It would teach the people to “*fear the LORD*.” This “fear” is not to feel uneasy toward God or dread Him. Instead, it teaches the person to remember that He is God, and we are not. We fear the LORD when we relate to Him for who He is. We walk humbly with God, admitting our needs but gratefully acknowledging His provision and grace. In “fear,” we do not run from Him. To “fear the LORD” is to draw near to Him in faith and honor Him appropriately. The tithe allows a person of faith to do both. We acknowledge that God is the One who sustains us, and we lift a grateful token of His goodness before Him.

Why a tenth and not a fifth or a twentieth? The Bible does not say. Perhaps it mirrors the response of Abraham (Genesis 14:20) or the pledge of Jacob (Genesis 28:22). It clearly represents a significant enough contribution to assure that faith would be required and reflected. It's more than giving the LORD the leftovers of one's resources. It's a tangible gesture of trust and reliance. As verse 23 indicates, it would teach His people to “*fear the Lord*.”

Of course, the question inevitably arises: Must New Testament followers of Jesus give a tithe to the LORD? Hasn't Jesus freed us from the requirements of the Law? The answer is “Yes.” Jesus has fulfilled critical elements of the Law on our behalf, and we should be eternally grateful. I know that I am, which begs the question—should I then offer the LORD less than the children of Israel? I don't want to fall into the trap of legalism regarding the tithe. Even so, I want to reflect a heart of faith that honors the One who has saved and graciously sustains me. And you?

March 17

Deuteronomy 16:18–18:22

Appoint judges and officials for yourselves from each of your tribes in all the towns the LORD your God is giving you. They must judge the people fairly. You must never twist justice or show partiality. Never accept a bribe, for bribes blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the decisions of the godly. Let true justice prevail, so you may live and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:18–20)

Justice, true justice, is vital for any civilization. When justice becomes corrupt or manipulated by the rich and powerful, societal stability is in jeopardy. You've heard the expression, "Justice is blind." It should be. From God's perspective, it must be. The LORD commands His people to appoint individuals who uphold what is right and apply the law fairly, without bias. We need to insist upon the same across our society. As Jesus' followers, we should demand a fair legal system for the rich and the poor, for the powerful and weak, and we must speak out when our system appears compromised or corrupt. We contribute to our nation's demise if we remain silent in the face of injustice. God demands justice, and His people must require the same. Justice is not a luxury for a healthy society. It's essential.

Today's reading also highlights God's expectations for those who would serve as the nation's kings. I was struck by how many future problems would have been avoided if the nation's rulers had obeyed His commands. For example, the LORD commands that a king must not take many wives for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). How many of king David's struggles would have been avoided if he had heeded God's instruction? The same is true of king Solomon. Additionally, how would they have ruled better if they had applied Deuteronomy 17:18-20? It reads, *"When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the LORD His God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel."*

How many verses of the Bible have you copied by hand? Do you think doing so would impress its lessons further upon your heart? God requires the nation's rulers to physically write out the whole book of Deuteronomy and carry it with them. They were to read it daily, reflect upon its wisdom, and obey its commands. Do you see the value of this? As the LORD explains, it will teach the king to walk humbly with the LORD, benefitting from His leadership and instruction. And what about us?

Consider the following exercise. Take a notebook and physically write out Deuteronomy 6. As you do, ask the LORD to speak, to impress His Word upon your heart. We may discover the practical benefit of God's instruction to Israel's kings. Give it a try, and you may adopt the practice more frequently.

March 18
Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do. When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don't go over the boughs twice. Leave the remaining olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, don't glean the vines after they are picked. Leave the remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. That is why I am giving you this command. (Deuteronomy 24:19–22)

Today's reading covers many different topics, from family relationships to sexual purity, from worship restrictions to various issues and guidelines. I am drawn to God's instruction concerning the people's approach to the harvest. Instead of over-picking a particular field, vine, or tree, God's people are directed to leave a small portion of the crop for those in need. It would become a societal safety net of sorts. Of course, foreigners, widows, and orphans still need to glean from the fields, orchards, and vineyards. As they did, it would simultaneously provide for their physical needs and promote a generous spirit among God's people.

Does God desire a similar approach from us? Few of us have a field or orchard, so the above injunction may appear irrelevant. However, the point of the passage is their attitude toward the poor and vulnerable. Will they act unselfishly for the sake of those in need? Or will they focus only on themselves, hoarding their resources for their benefit alone? Jesus shares a parable that might add to our consideration.

“A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’ But God said to him, “You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?”’ (Luke 12:16–20)

Jesus exposes a self-centered approach to life, which is far too familiar. He calls for His disciples to become rich in ways that matter to God—which involves compassion and generosity. How we express that in our day may vary. The key is to look for opportunities to help the vulnerable, responding in ways we can. God commands His people to live unselfishly and to show appropriate concern. May the LORD help us do so into the day ahead.

March 19
Deuteronomy 26:1-29:1

When you cross the Jordan River and enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. Write this whole body of instruction on them when you cross the river to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you—a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. (Deuteronomy 27:2–3)

The people of God cannot do what they do not know. They cannot understand what they have not heard or read. God provides a practical solution to solve this. He instructs His people to erect large stones as they enter the land of promise. Next, they are to plaster the rocks so that God's covenant teaching can be written on the stones for all to see. Again, people cannot do what they do not know. They cannot know what they have not heard or read. God ensures the people understand His will and promises as they publicly renew their covenant.

The covenant renewal would be a dramatic ceremony. The people are divided to stand across two mountains. The ark of the covenant would be positioned in the valley below. Six tribes stand across Mount Ebal and six along Mount Gerazim as God's people declare their intentions. The choice is between being blessed by God or being cursed. They can have God working for or against them. He will multiply their victories or guarantee their defeat. The decision is theirs to make, and the consequences are assured.

In Joshua 8, God's people do as He prescribes. Joshua reads God's Law before the people, and Israel announces their decision. The twelve tribes declare their loyalty to God by following His lead. It is an exciting step forward for God's covenant people.

How does any of this relate to us? We, too, should consistently confess our intentions. There should be no doubt about where we stand. We should commit ourselves to follow Jesus' lead publicly and privately. Of course, we cannot do what we do not know, and we will not know apart from a genuine commitment to His Word. The need is not for us to write His testimony upon plastered stones. Instead, the priority should be to read and reflect consistently upon God's Word so that we carry His message with us. So, let's stand up and declare our intentions. We are followers of Jesus Christ and will walk in His ways. Do you agree?

March 20

Deuteronomy 29:2-31:29

So Moses wrote this entire body of instruction in a book and gave it to the priests, who carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant, and to the elders of Israel. Then Moses gave them this command: "At the end of every seventh year, the Year of Release, during the Festival of Shelters, you must read this Book of Instruction to all the people of Israel when they assemble before the LORD your God at the place He chooses. Call them all together—men, women, children, and the foreigners living in your towns—so they may hear this Book of Instruction and learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully obey all the terms of these instructions. Do this so that your children who have not known these instructions will hear them and will learn to fear the LORD your God. Do this as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy." (Deuteronomy 31:9-13)

As was highlighted yesterday, God's Word is vital for His covenant people. His wisdom, commands, and promises must not be neglected or ignored. They are the basis of Israel's future hope. God's revelation is a "Book of Instruction" for the twelve tribes. That is how His revelation is described—six times in four chapters (Deuteronomy 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:11, 12, 26). Over and over again, His teaching is described in the most practical terms. It is "the Book of Instruction." Literally, it is the book of the "TORAH." The Hebrew word, TORAH, can be translated as "direction, teaching, law, or instruction." It is the source of God's necessary guidance.

It is one thing for God's people to admit this. It is something else for them to act as if this is true. God calls for His people to act accordingly. That would require the "Book of Instruction" to be consistently read. Every seventh year, the people were to gather and read the text aloud. Unlike our day, not everyone had access to copies of Scripture. They depended on these gatherings to ensure the people, young and old alike, understood the testimony of God's Word. Do know: God's people would discuss and remind one another of His teaching yearly. The seven-year cycle would guarantee familiarity and elevate the priority of God's revelation.

And for us? Recent studies indicate that biblical literacy is on the decline. People are less informed than previous generations. Even the pandemic of 2020 did not change the trend. A national survey in 2021 revealed that people read the Bible less than before the pandemic. Though we can't alter the actions of others, we can take responsibility for ourselves. Your participation in a chronological reading of the Bible is a step in the right direction. However, our greater focus must remain on Jesus and His work on our behalf. We do not read to fulfill a religious requirement. We read to discover the greater truth concerning Jesus and the difference He makes. Persist in your daily readings, but do so from a heart of faith. May God open your spiritual eyes as you do.

March 21
Deuteronomy 31:30–32:52; Psalm 90:1-17

I will proclaim the name of the LORD; how glorious is our God! He is the Rock; His deeds are perfect. Everything He does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright He is! (Deuteronomy 32:3–4)

Today's reading includes a song and psalm, both from Moses. The song may not make your list of favorites. It's intended more to instruct than to inspire. That said, his testimony concerning the LORD stands out. He confesses,

"Everything He does is just and fair."

Consider this statement in light of Moses' inability to enter the land of promise. He doesn't allow his disappointment to distort or diminish his perception of God. From Moses' perspective, *"He is a faithful God who does no wrong."* Again, his testimony stands out to me. And you?

I'm also encouraged by Moses' prayer in Psalm 90. He writes, *"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom . . . Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."* (Psalm 90:12, 14, ESV)

Both appeals are helpful. First, it's beneficial to keep a proper perspective on life. **Every day matters, and we make a mistake when we fixate on the future at the expense of today.** Through his prayer, Moses promotes the wise approach. "Lord, teach us to appreciate the importance of the day at hand and to live accordingly." Will we take this lesson to heart?

Second, Moses reminds us where true life is found. It is the LORD who inwardly satisfies the heart. It is His steadfast love that generates lasting joy. Again, given the ups and downs of Moses' experience, it's instructive to hear Moses' appeal. "Lord, what I essentially need is You. You are the One who satisfies my heart." Can we confess the same? Will we turn to Him today?

A song and a psalm of Moses—may the Lord encourage our hearts as we allow Moses' experience to influence our own.

March 22

Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12; Joshua 1:1-2:24

This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, gave to the people of Israel before his death (Deuteronomy 33:1) ... So Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, just as the LORD had said (Deuteronomy 34:5) ... There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. (Deuteronomy 34:10)

Today, I highlight three verses, each pointing us to Moses. First, note how Moses is described as he prepares to bless the various tribes. Matter-of-factly, he is referred to as “*the man of God*.” A truer statement could not be made concerning Israel’s leader. Though he is not a perfect man or leader, Moses displayed a devotion to God that should be acknowledged and celebrated. He was faithful to God’s calling, committed to God’s Word, and determined to do whatever was necessary for the sake of God’s people. He was undeniably a man of God.

What might be said of us? Is our devotion to God so apparent that people would describe us as a man or woman of God? It suggests more than a singular moment or action. It portrays an extended pattern. Interestingly, Moses doesn’t emerge as the man of God until he responds to the LORD at the burning bush—later in life. He was 80 at the time. I mention that to illustrate that we are never too young or old to allow God to affect our lives.

Second, as we are informed of Moses’ death, he is also described as the “*servant of the LORD*.” We should readily appreciate how this relates to the earlier description. It is impossible to be a man or woman of God and not be His servant. Service characterizes those who know God and seek to follow Him. Moses did not let his identity as God’s man go to his head. If you recall, Moses was described earlier in our readings as the humblest of all men (Numbers 12:3). Though elevated by God to a position of great authority, Moses is described as a servant—not a ruler. Let’s reflect upon that for a minute. How often do we strive for recognition that places us above others? The legacy of Moses’ life is that he was the LORD’s servant. May that also be said of us.

Finally, Moses is distinguished as God’s prophet because he knew the LORD face to face. The uniqueness of his relationship with the LORD is without question. He was privileged to approach God in ways that set him apart from his brother Aaron, the priests and Levites, and even Joshua, his protégé. There was something special about the relationship he enjoyed with the LORD that would not be repeated.

Admitting that, however, do we recognize the privilege that is ours? Because of Jesus, we have become the Temple of the LORD whose Spirit dwells within us so that we might experience His life and power within (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18). I mention that because we, too, should be drawing near to the LORD. By faith, we should seek Him in ways that affect our lives, reflect His glory, and enable us to accomplish what He desires. Yes, let’s marvel at Moses’ relationship with the LORD, but let’s not stop short of what He wants with us.

Three verses. Three descriptions. Three considerations to encourage us forward in our faith

March 23

Joshua 3-6

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had chosen—one from each of the tribes of Israel. He told them, “Go into the middle of the Jordan, in front of the Ark of the LORD your God. Each of you must pick up one stone and carry it out on your shoulder—twelve stones in all, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ Then you can tell them, ‘They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant went across.’ These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever.” (Joshua 4:4–7)

We all need spiritual markers—monuments to remind us of God’s faithfulness. Today’s reading highlights this principle as God instructs His people to erect a memorial as they cross miraculously into the land of promise. The monument would consist of twelve select stones placed upon one another as a visible tribute to God’s grace and power. And what story do the rocks tell?

At God’s command, it begins with the Ark of the Covenant being carried into the rising waters of the Jordan. What are the Levites thinking as they wade into the river’s flow? Their instructions seem incomplete: *“Take a few steps into the river and then stop there.”* And then? That’s the beauty of the story. The priests are asked to step forward without being informed of the result. It’s like the LORD is saying, “Trust Me. I’ve got this, but you need to step out.” To their credit, that’s what they do. The Levites plunge their feet into the water with the Ark of the Covenant upon their shoulders.

Of course, the Levites are not moving toward the river Jordan alone. The twelve tribes of Israel follow at an appropriate distance. They witness the actions of the priests, but more significantly, they behold the power of God. The water’s flow changes as soon as the priests’ feet touch the water until the riverbed is dry (Joshua 3:15–16). God creates a way where there is no way.

Now that’s a story to tell! No, that’s a testimony to remember—thus the marker. God commands Joshua to take action to ensure the people would not soon forget. Representatives from each of the twelve tribes return to the riverbed. They individually collect and carry sizable stones into the land of promise to erect the monument. Think about that. Their first action as they step toward the future is remembering God’s faithfulness.

How about us? Should we have a marker or two to encourage us forward? I’m not suggesting anything elaborate. Instead, identify something simple that will prompt your heart and remind you of something significant. For example, place an item in your home that reminds you that you have been saved by God’s grace through Jesus—a tangible reminder of God’s forgiveness and salvation. Second, place another marker somewhere in your home or office that directs your mind to God’s sustaining grace—a physical token that points to God’s ability to carry you through life’s hardships or challenges. Again, the markers can be simple, but the testimony will be far-reaching.

Will we do it? God thought it was important enough for the children of Israel to remember. Maybe you and I should do the same.

March 24
Joshua 7:1; 1 Chronicles 2:7; Joshua 7:2-9:27

So approximately 3,000 warriors were sent, but they were soundly defeated. The men of Ai chased the Israelites from the town gate as far as the quarries, and they killed about thirty-six who were retreating down the slope. The Israelites were paralyzed with fear at this turn of events, and their courage melted away. (Joshua 7:4-5)

The children of Israel go from victory to defeat unexpectedly. They presume their early success at Jericho would lead to an easy victory at Ai. They are greatly mistaken. They approach the task without consulting the LORD and are soundly defeated. What went wrong? Why did they suffer such a disheartening defeat?

Joshua initially blames the LORD but soon discovers the problem is with the people. Israel had sinned against God and had broken the covenant. Someone within the camp disregarded God's command and stole items in Jericho that should have been set apart for the LORD. As a result, Joshua calls for the people to purify themselves and submit to God's examination. It must have been a fearful exercise as the LORD singles out Achan—who confesses his sin.

"It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. Among the plunder I saw a beautiful robe from Babylon, 200 silver coins, and a bar of gold weighing more than a pound. I wanted them so much that I took them. They are hidden in the ground beneath my tent, with the silver buried deeper than the rest." (Joshua 7:20-21)

Achan made a severe mistake in thinking God's commands did not matter. Instead of focusing on the LORD and His instructions, he was tempted by the costly items he observed in Jericho. Achan sees, desires, takes, and conceals the forbidden objects. He foolishly believes he can get away with his sin. This pattern is tragically too common. How often do we repeat the same sequence—to see, desire, take, and conceal? May God forgive us and help us to learn from Achan's actions.

However, there's one other lesson to consider. The consequences of Achan's disobedience went further than he could have anticipated. It leads to Israel's defeat at Ai. It results in the public exposure of his sin. And even more significantly, Achan forfeits his life and that of his family. We can be sure that he never intended any of that to happen, but that is often the nature of sin. It puts into motion heartbreaking consequences that will reach far beyond our control. We should consider that and allow Achan's experience to be a cautionary tale when tempted and enticed. Will we do so? I pray the answer is "Yes" as we seek to follow the LORD.

March 25
Joshua 10:1-12:6

As the LORD had commanded His servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua. And Joshua did as he was told, carefully obeying all the commands that the LORD had given to Moses. So Joshua conquered the entire region—the hill country, the entire Negev, the whole area around the town of Goshen, the western foothills, the Jordan Valley, the mountains of Israel, and the Galilean foothills. (Joshua 11:15–16)

Today's reading highlights a series of victories for God's people. Even when their enemies combine forces, they are no match for the LORD's army. God's people are victorious again and again. Yet, it is not without a struggle. They prevail as the LORD works through them, and that's helpful to remember. God is not watching at a distance. The soldiers are not passive in the conflict. Instead, the LORD leads and empowers the children of Israel to defeat their enemies—no matter the number or size. They even overwhelm the descendants of Anak (Joshua 11:21), who caused their parents to shudder in fear (Numbers 13:32-33). That's right. They defeat the so-called giants of Anak.

Think about that for a moment. One generation, intimidated by the Anakim, turns away from the land in fear. Another generation steps forward with the LORD and discovers that even giants are no match when God joins you in the battle. Which generation do we identify with more? Are we stepping toward life's giants with the LORD? Or are we doubting Him and turning away? If we're honest, we probably reflect both responses at different times. If that's true, let's learn from today's reading and renew our commitment to follow the LORD's lead.

Of course, that is the key to Israel's success. Joshua carefully obeys the LORD's commands as they enter the land. He doesn't seek God's blessing on a plan of his own making. Instead, Joshua leads the people according to God's plan and promise so they can experience God's power. Is that our approach?

Admittedly, asking God to endorse our plans is the easier route to take. Yet, if we genuinely seek God's activity, shouldn't we take the necessary time to pursue God's counsel? But do we? Do we consistently seek the timeless wisdom of His Word? Do we humble our hearts in prayer, actively seeking God's leadership and will? Do you think we should? With Joshua as our example, let's face our giants according to God's plan and discover He is more than able!

March 26

Joshua 12:7-15:19

“So give me the hill country that the LORD promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns. But if the LORD is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the LORD said.” (Joshua 14:12)

If God promises us victory in battle, do we enter the fight? Or do we prefer to avoid the struggle altogether? Yesterday, we read about the Israelites defeating the famed descendants of Anak—the fearsome giants of the land (Joshua 11:21-22). Our reading today provides a little more detail. How are the Anakim defeated? It’s not by accident. It requires the faith and courage of one of Israel’s oldest leaders. The former scout of Israel, Caleb, steps up and says, “Give me the hill country!”

We have to admire Caleb’s boldness. At age 85, he’s not looking for an easy path. He chooses a fight that younger hearts might seek to avoid. He calls out, “Give me the giants.” Again, we have to be impressed. However, maybe we should do more than marvel at God’s aging warrior. Perhaps we should be challenged instead. Think about it. What battles are still before us? Are we stepping toward them, making ourselves available? Or do we pursue the path of least resistance?

I’m not suggesting we can choose a random problem and then presume success. That isn’t Caleb’s approach. The LORD guides His servant’s action, and God’s promise becomes the basis of his boldness. Let’s learn from this. We, too, must seek God’s leadership **moving forward**. We don’t chart our path. We follow God’s lead by faith. As we do, we also cling to His promise, anticipating His provision in the battle. Let’s remind ourselves that we serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and don’t forget Caleb.

Caleb courageously steps forward in faith, but there is one further description that should also be noted. *“He wholeheartedly followed the LORD, the God of Israel.” (Joshua 14:14)* And the lesson? We don’t experience God’s victories by being half-hearted in our commitment. Maybe that is already presumed on our part, but then again, maybe not. Our commitment to the LORD must be complete as we step toward our giants. Anything less will likely result in us abandoning the struggle prematurely, stopping short of the victory that could be.

Sadly, today’s reading indicates as much among some of the other tribes of Israel (Joshua 13:13). They fail to drive out their enemies and are left to deal with the consequences for years to come. Let that not be said of us. Like Caleb, let’s step forward in faith, become courageous in heart, and remain wholly committed to the LORD as we enter the battle. May it be so!

March 27

Joshua 15:20-17:18

The descendants of Joseph came to Joshua and asked, “Why have you given us only one portion of land as our homeland when the LORD has blessed us with so many people?” Joshua replied, “If there are so many of you, and if the hill country of Ephraim is not large enough for you, clear out land for yourselves in the forest where the Perizzites and Rephaites live.” The descendants of Joseph responded, “It’s true that the hill country is not large enough for us. But all the Canaanites in the lowlands have iron chariots, both those in Beth-shan and its surrounding settlements and those in the valley of Jezreel. They are too strong for us.” (Joshua 17:14–16)

In yesterday’s reading, Caleb models the proper approach to victory with God: Act according to God’s promise and wholeheartedly follow God’s lead. Yet, yesterday’s passage also illustrates that not everyone followed Caleb’s example. Some of the tribes stopped short of what could be. They fail to secure the land that God promised would be theirs.

Today’s reading highlights this same problem as the descendants of Joseph allowed their fear to get the best of them. Instead of focusing on the LORD and His provision, they fixate on the enemy’s perceived strength and resources. *“They are too strong for us,”* they exclaim. They make no mention of God at all. Again, they allow their fear to get the best of them.

Let’s admit that fear is often an unexpected, uncontrollable emotion. We don’t plan to be afraid. We simply are, which is usually the result of the circumstances or the possibility of what might be. Something alarms us, which causes us to feel uneasy. The question is, “How will we respond?” Will we focus on the source of our fear or direct our hearts to the One who can make the critical difference? Caleb, the senior adult warrior, chose to focus on the LORD.

In contrast, the descendants of Joseph (probably younger and with more significant numbers) decided to focus on the circumstances. Of course, Caleb experiences God’s help and overcomes his giants. The descendants of Joseph ignore the LORD and settle for less. What is our approach?

I want to be clear. I don’t believe that fear is the absence of faith. Not so. From my perspective, possessing faith and still feeling afraid is possible. Faith is the path that helps us move through our fears to experience God’s presence and help. Does that make sense? Fear is an emotional reaction. Faith is a spiritual plan of action that moves us through the circumstances that make us afraid. I will never condemn someone for being frightened. I want to remind them they are not facing the troubling situation alone. *“They are too strong for us,”* the descendants of Joseph exclaim. Someone among them should have stood up and declared, *“But the LORD is with us, and our GOD is stronger still.”*

May God help us focus on His presence so we keep moving forward—despite the challenges. Let’s not stop short of what can be!

March 28

Joshua 18:1-19:48

Now that the land was under Israelite control, the entire community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tabernacle. (Joshua 18:1)

The people gathered at Shiloh and erected the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting. It is a significant moment for God's covenant people. It's the first time the Tabernacle is mentioned since the people crossed into the land of promise, and it indicates the people's general success in securing the land. God is keeping His promises. The children of Israel are taking possession of the land.

However, the setup of the Tabernacle is intended to do something more. The conquest of the land is beginning to slow. Though God consistently provides victory, the effort required is significant on the people's part. It appears that a delay has resulted. Joshua appeals, *"How long are you going to wait before taking possession of the remaining land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given to you?"* (Joshua 18:3) Their job is not yet complete. Seven of the twelve tribes have not received their promised allotments. There are battles still to be fought.

Setting up the Tabernacle at Shiloh is intended to remind the people of God's presence and inspire them to finish the task. Joshua also takes additional action by organizing a "mapping" party to lay out the remaining areas to be secured. Three representatives from each of the seven tribes, who had yet to receive their allotments, are sent to map out the territory. They are instructed to explore the land and carefully write a description. They are then to return to the Tabernacle, and the land would be appropriately assigned in the presence of the LORD.

Think about the practicality of this measure. It enlarges the people's vision of what should be as they map the land. Allotting the regions before their future battles also reminds the people of what will be. At the Tabernacle of the LORD, the people renew their focus and are sent to fulfill God's promise on their behalf.

Do you see a potential correlation with us? We are obviously not involved in military conquests, and for that, I am thankful. However, we are called to fulfill Christ's mission—to reflect His character and extend His hope. Jesus sends us out with the promise of victory. But let's be honest, sometimes we become weary and delay our efforts. That's where gathering with the people of God is so important. It reminds us of what should be and what will be as we study His Word. We gather in Jesus' name to renew our focus so that we might be sent out anew to fulfill God's promise on our behalf.

Think about that as you enter the day ahead. If you have become sluggish or delayed, maybe you need to gather with God's people in His presence. As you do, may the LORD refocus your heart in ways that also move you forward. May it be so!

March 29
Joshua 19:49-21:45; 1 Chronicles 6:54-81

After all the land was divided among the tribes, the Israelites gave a piece of land to Joshua as his allocation. For the LORD had said he could have any town he wanted. He chose Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim. He rebuilt the town and lived there. (Joshua 19:49-50)

Two thoughts stand out from today's reading. First, as highlighted above, Joshua receives his allotment of land last. If anyone could have been justified in pushing himself to the front of the line, it could have been Joshua. Think about it. He and Caleb trusted the LORD when the Exodus generation refused to do so. Joshua is then appointed Moses' successor to lead the next generation forward. He shoulders a level of responsibility that no one else would. He deals with the nation's successes and failures as only a leader can. Undoubtedly, his path was often stressful and lonely to travel.

Even so, Joshua doesn't elevate himself in a way that would interfere with his effectiveness or role. Like Moses, he displays a humility that should likewise characterize our approach. I'm not suggesting that Joshua didn't receive a prime piece of property. No doubt he did.

My point is this: Joshua's focus and general practice do not appear self-serving. Instead, he reflects the attitude that Jesus later promotes, *"Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."* (Mark 9:35) May we adopt the same attitude and approach.

The second point of emphasis is the concluding summary of God's faithfulness.

"Not a single one of all the good promises the LORD had given to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; everything He had spoken came true." (Joshua 21:45)

If that doesn't strengthen one's faith in the LORD, I don't know what will. God keeps His promises. That's true with the children of Israel. And bless the LORD, it's also true with us. The Apostle Paul expresses it well,

"For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding 'Yes!' And through Christ, our 'Amen' (which means 'Yes') ascends to God for His glory." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Think about the implications of what that means and be encouraged. God is faithful to His promises. Let's live today accordingly!

March 30

Joshua 22:1-24:33

*The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God.
We will obey Him alone." (Joshua 24:24)*

At the end of Joshua's life, he asks God's people to look again within their hearts. He had witnessed the children of Israel turning to the LORD over his lifespan. But he had also observed them turn away. He had experienced the best and worst of possibilities—blessing and judgment. With the end of his life in view, the aging leader asks the twelve tribes to renew their trust in God. He appeals,

*"Fear the LORD and serve Him wholeheartedly.
Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates
River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD alone." (Joshua 24:14)*

Joshua is not naïve. He recognizes that each generation must choose for themselves. We don't inherit faith. We embrace it, or we don't. Joshua challenges the emerging leaders to choose the LORD. There's no question in Joshua's mind or heart concerning where he stands. *"As for me and my family," Joshua declares, "we will serve the LORD."* It must have lifted the leader's heart to hear the people confess the same.

What about us? Where does our commitment lie? For that matter, how often should we declare our devotion to the LORD? I think the more, the better. I say that because of the competing voices that surround us. Day after day, something new appeals to our hearts, seeking to lure us away. Day after day, we determine who we will trust and follow. Is it Jesus? Or do we yield ourselves to another? Again, there's value in fresh commitments. I remind you of Jesus' words,

*"If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross
daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)*

It sounds like a renewed determination is beneficial, even necessary. So what's it going to be? The choice is before us. Who will we follow and serve today? As for me and my family, we will serve the LORD. And you?

March 31

Judges 1:1-3:30

The LORD was with the people of Judah, and they took possession of the hill country. But they failed to drive out the people living in the plains, who had iron chariots ... The tribe of Benjamin, however, failed to drive out the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem ... The tribe of Manasseh failed to drive out the people living in Beth-shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, and all their surrounding settlements ... The tribe of Ephraim failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer ... The tribe of Zebulun failed to drive out the residents of Kitron and Nahalol ... The tribe of Asher failed to drive out the residents of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob ... Likewise, the tribe of Naphtali failed to drive out the residents of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath. (Judges 1:19, 21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33)

God led His covenant people into the land of promise to take possession of it. He guarantees their victory if they will only follow His lead. The good news is that they secure a large portion of the land. The bad news is that they stopped short of what God intended. Tribe after tribe, for whatever reason, fails to drive out their enemies and take full possession of the land. Of course, from our readings in Joshua, we know the reason. The people doubt God, doubt themselves and then fail to act in His power. Again, they stop short of what could have been.

Maybe the people thought that they would act upon God's command later—in the future. Sadly, they fail to understand that God's promise of victory would be withdrawn due to their prolonged disobedience and compromise. The angel of the LORD delivers the message, *"I brought you out of Egypt into this land that I swore to give your ancestors, and I said I would never break My covenant with you. For your part, you were not to make any covenants with the people living in this land; instead, you were to destroy their altars. But you disobeyed My command. Why did you do this? So now I declare that I will no longer drive out the people living in your land. They will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a constant temptation to you."* (Judges 2:1–3)

The children of Israel missed their opportunity. God promised their victory. His people, however, took His promises for granted. They disregarded His commands and are now left with the consequences. They, their children, and future generations will encounter temptations and hardships that could have been avoided. Why did they refuse to trust the LORD and follow His lead? The realization of their loss overwhelms them as they publicly weep and grieve.

Let's learn from this episode. Are we taking God's promises for granted? Are we short-sighted in delaying our obedience to God's Word? Could we lose future opportunities because of our unwillingness to follow God's lead today? Please know that **delayed obedience is disobedience**, and disobedience will diminish God's activity in our lives. Let's not make the same mistake.

By faith, let's renew our commitment to follow Jesus, taking hold of His promises and claiming the spiritual ground He desires for us to take. Let's not miss this moment nor jeopardize future opportunities. With the courage of Joshua and Caleb, may we step boldly toward the LORD and His work through our lives. May it be so today!

Devotions written and prepared by Stephen Lowrie
All references unless noted: New Living Translation