

# Joshua – Moving Forward

## #1 How to get from here to there

## Joshua Chapter 1

These people pictured here are generating daily conversations about, **“What makes for a good leader?”**



Kevin Kruse, author and leadership consultant in USA, writing in Forbes, claims to capture **“leadership”** in a motto. He points to **deficiencies** in definitions highly credentialed experts like Drucker, Bennis, Gates, and Maxwell, and says:

“Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal.”

**But what do you look for in a leader?** What is it about someone that makes you want to follow them, or not? And, what do you think is **missing** from this definition of leadership on screen? What might be required of God’s leaders?

The Bible seems to have a different angle on leadership. This is clear in the appointment of Joshua to lead the ancient people of God.<sup>1</sup> You may be surprised to find that **the three keys** to his “success” **did not** involve **charismatic personality, or proven skills, or academic credentials.**

Instead, see what God required. In chapter 1 we read:

<sup>7</sup> ‘Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

An old mentor of mine used to quote verse 7 and say: “Christians should not commit to one side of politics or the other. The bible says do not ‘...turn to the right or to the left’”. He was joking, of course.

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<sup>1</sup> See our intro to The Book of Joshua here <http://www.stmichaelsnc.org.au/the-book-of-joshua/>

More helpfully, we see in this chapter a **3-fold partnership** between **God, the leader, and God's people** as the key to life in God's "Promised Land".

## Three-fold partnership – Joshua ch. 1

### 1. God

Firstly, let's look at **the role of God** in this partnership.

#### i. The **Call** of God (2)

There's the **call of God** in verse 2. God "spoke"<sup>2</sup> to Joshua, as had been the case with Moses:

"<sup>2</sup>Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the River Jordan into the land I am about to give to them – to the Israelites." And in verse 6 God says: "you will **lead** these people".

Joshua had been **Understudy** to Moses for years.<sup>3</sup> But Moses' was **unique**.<sup>4</sup> His time and purpose had passed. A new phase of the outworking of God's promise is before us. Now, God calls this leader **and** the people **into partnership** to **move forward** to where God leads.

There are echoes of God's call to Joshua in **God's call to you and me**. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, calls people: "come follow me".<sup>5</sup> We, in turn, motivated to call others to follow see what we have found and where God promises to lead **us** into peace and wholeness.

#### ii. The **Promise** and **Presence** of God (3-5)

There's also the **promise** and **presence** of God in vss. 3-4. God re-affirmed the same promise given to Moses, saying:

"<sup>3</sup>Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. <sup>4</sup>From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory."

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<sup>22</sup> The God of the Bible is depicted as communicating with key figures personally, in word, at key moments.

<sup>3</sup> See our introduction to the Book of Joshua <http://www.stmichaelsnc.org.au/the-book-of-joshua/>

<sup>4</sup> Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:3

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Matt. 4:19

This vast area known as the “Promised Land” was territory **rich with resources and beauty**.<sup>6</sup> It was gifted by God to this decimated remnant of poor refugee tribes to be their new home. They had **no claim to it or merit to deserve it**.

Joshua must have felt the weight of responsibility on his shoulders. But immediately God alleviated Joshua’s stress, set him straight, and reminded him that he was simply to **put one foot in front of the other**. **Reliance on God** is the key to this leadership.

No wonder the Apostles of Jesus drew upon the language and imagery of Joshua’s story when describing **our** salvation and destiny in Christ. Our calling by God in the Gospel of Jesus too is to a promised **“inheritance.”** The rewards of faith too, for us, are granted by grace, by **no merit** of our own.<sup>7</sup> We too are **being led** to a place of wholeness and **rest**, or peace. Ephesians 1:18 says God has called us to:

“...the riches of God’s glorious **inheritance** in His holy people...”<sup>8</sup>

Hebrews chapter 4:8-9 **points back to Joshua** and speaks of our “rest” from wandering, now that we know Christ.

But note, God gave **not only** this promise but the **assurance** of God’s **presence**. In verse 5 God says to Joshua:

“<sup>5</sup>As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.”

The **glue** of this partnership is God’s **presence**. The first followers of Jesus must have recognised the familiar strains of Scripture in the Lord’s words when the resurrected Christ said to them:

“...surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Exodus 3:8

<sup>7</sup> Eph. 2:8-9 regarding merit

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 1:4 says “...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” 2 Peter 1:3 says “[Jesus’] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 28:20

We too are blessed with **the presence** and **the promise** of God in Christ. Our right response is to **move forward** by faith on the **path God leads us** by the example and teaching of Jesus towards wholeness and peace.

God's call to Joshua reminds us of Jesus' call upon our lives and its accompanying benefits. It also reveals the inextricable role of God in Joshua's leadership of God's people.

## 2. The Leader

The **second string** of the 3 stranded cord of leadership in Joshua ch. 1 is partnership between the **leader and God**.

Joshua foreshadows the kind of discipleship Jesus desires from each of us: that is, **day to day reliance on God by faith**.

### i. **Courage** (6,7,9)

Firstly, Joshua is called to take **courage**. In vs. 6 God says, "Be strong and very courageous." It's repeated in verse 7 and 9!

Joshua had already learned by observing Moses how partnership with God strengthens weak arms and weak knees.<sup>10</sup> In the Old Testament Book of Numbers we read how Moses sent **12 spies** to report back on what chance Israel had of calling the Promised Land their home. **10 of the 12** returned saying "**It'll never happen**". The existing tenants appeared hostile, ungodly, formidable, and unwelcoming. **Only 2 of 12** showed courage and faith - **Joshua** and Caleb.<sup>11</sup> The Scriptures tell us that God **was with them**.<sup>12</sup>

In our Christian lives there is a similar curious **interconnection** between the **presence** of God with us and our ability to **step forward** into unknown territory with **strong faith**. In Philippians chapter 2 Paul writes:

"<sup>12</sup>Therefore... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for [God's] good pleasure."

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. Exodus 17:8-13

<sup>11</sup> Numbers 13:1 – 14:9

<sup>12</sup> Numbers 14:24; 27:18 The people didn't listen to Joshua and Caleb and spent another 40 years wandering until almost all died, but not Caleb & Joshua.

Joshua's courage was as much a function of God's grace as it was a matter of summoning faith from within him.

John Calvin, the great European reformer, wrote:

“Faith brings nothing of our own to God, but receives what God spontaneously offers us. Hence it is that faith, however imperfect, nevertheless possesses a perfect righteousness, because it has respect to nothing but the gratuitous goodness of God.”

For us too, faith (“stepping forward” into the unknown with trust in God) is all the more assured to us as a gift of God's grace that generates our willingness to believe. The writer to the Hebrews calls Jesus:

“...the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2)

What a great encouragement to know that faith for leadership in Joshua's case involved partnership with God. His was a foreshadowing of the faith God calls us to and enables in all who follow Jesus today.

ii. **Devotion (8)**

Not only was Joshua to take up courage, his role in this partnership with God required him to **know** God and **show** God undivided **devotion**. In verse 8 God says to Joshua:

“<sup>8</sup>This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.”

The “book of the law” was the revelation of God given to Moses<sup>13</sup>, recorded in the earlier books of the Old Testament. The Scriptures were, for Joshua, critical for knowing God and being in partnership with God. This foundation for knowing God has been true throughout the history of God's people. The **Word of God** is the **key** today to **knowing** God and **showing** God devotion fit for true faith and giving assurance of hope.

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<sup>13</sup> Deuteronomy 28:58

The Apostles urged Christians in the writings of the New Testament to **so know** Christ as God's "Living Word" and to so trust in Scripture as the written Word of God that we would also **show** our dependence on God in our daily lives. For example, Paul wrote to a young church leader, Timothy, saying:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God<sup>10</sup> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

(2 Tim. 3:16)

As with Joshua, so with us, the revelation of God in Holy Scripture is critical for our journey of faith.

### 3. The People

**Thirdly**, the **3-fold partnership** that depicts the leadership Joshua is called to involves the people of God. In verse 10 and 11 we read:

<sup>10</sup> So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: <sup>11</sup> 'Go through the camp and tell the people, "Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

In the remaining verses chapter 1 Joshua calls the **people** of God to **join him**, to believe the **promise** and the **presence** of God is with them, and to take up **courage** and **faith**.

Leadership in God's economy is **nothing** unless it is conducted in **partnership with God** and in partnership **with God's people**. Success, or reaching the goal of God's promises, depends **solely on God**, yet God invites us all to be part of the outworking of the plan.

In the New Testament we learn how Jesus **fulfils** the roles of prophets, priests and kings alike. And as a result, all God's people **share** in the advancement of God's mission to bring healing and wholeness. As Peter writes, we are:

"a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that we may declare God's praises..." (1 Peter 2:9).

And, the Book of Revelation declares, we have been made:

“...a kingdom and priests to our God, and [we] shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10)

Before the Protestant Reformation, in the middle ages, leadership in the church had so drifted from the teaching of the New Testament that hierarchy existed such that the ordained were set “over” the baptized. The German reformer, Martin Luther, challenged this prevailing notion, rejecting the Church’s often corrupt power/distance control over the “laity”. The Church rested its idea of the unique priestly class on tradition rather than the authority of Scripture. The translation of the Bible from Latin into the common tongue in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century enabled Luther and others to see the radical democracy of leadership instituted by Christ. Luther taught the Bible makes clear that we are a “priesthood of all believers” and he denounced the priesthood of only a select few. In his typical pithy manner, he claimed:

“Faith alone is the true priestly office.”

He claimed it was an office of Christ we Christians share by grace, just as we all share in the blessing of our union with Him.

In Joshua chapter 1 we have a glimpse of God’s three-fold partnership for leadership among God’s people: God – Leaders – People all involved together in advancing towards the full realization of God’s promise.

We live in a time of **blame-shifting** from one civic leader to another. Rarely do citizens turn the mirror on themselves! But in the Church, **grandiose ideas** of the role church leaders have no place, whether it be the over-inflated ego of one who holds office, or the over-estimation of the leader’s role by church members. The New Testament is clear that Jesus is the head of the Church.<sup>14</sup> Leaders are **merely accountable representatives**, should strive to be good **exemplars** of faith, and must be **servants among** the people God. Leaders, as was true in the call to

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<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 1:22,23, Colossians 1:18

Joshua, must be partners with God, and with the people of God, with the leaders and the people moving forward together in faith.

Pray for church leaders by all means. But more importantly, pray for our partnership together, that God may embolden our faith as we follow the lead of our Lord.