

Joshua: Stretch Your Prayer Life

“Your Christian life should lead you to places you’d rather not go.” Henri Nouwen

That sums up our theme of ADDventure and ADDitude change this year. We reject comfortable Christianity. We are seeking radical followership of Jesus Christ.

Let’s take a moment to stretch because today’s message and communion are definitely going to require you to stretch. [Stretch Break]

In fact, the title of today’s lesson is, Joshua: Stretch Your Prayer Life

1) Preprayer for battle (Tent of meeting, angel near Jericho)

Joshua had some big shoes to fill. Maybe the biggest in the Old Testament. He was supposed to be the guy to succeed Moses and he was supposed to lead the people to do something that even Moses couldn’t do: take over the promised land.

How is he going to be able to do all of that?

Well, he has to preprayer!

Exodus 33:7-11

Before he ever led anyone or learned military strategy, he spent hours and days with God. He spent time with Moses while Moses talked with God (like going and having a quiet time with someone). He knew God through prayer so he was able to lead.

Let’s look at this in action just before Israel is preparing for their first battle in the promised land against the city of Jericho:

Joshua 5:13-15

I like to imagine that Joshua, as a good military commander, is going out and scouting out the city under cover of darkness and he stumbles upon this mighty soldier with his sword drawn. It would be like getting ready to play some pick up basketball and as you’re picking teams Kobe Bryant walks up. You would say exactly what Joshua said, “Are you for us?” Whose team are you going to be on?

The man, the angel, or as many believe: Jesus standing there answers by saying he’s not on either side. It’s as if he says, “you can chose to fight on my team, there’s another more important side to this battle - God’s.”

I think it's because of all the time spent in the tent of meeting with Moses. Joshua knows exactly what to do. He falls on his face in submissive worship. He takes off his sandals and receives the battle plan for the conquering the first of 31 cities in the Promised Land. This battle was very important. It would strike fear into all the other nations if it went well. It would give Israel confidence. Or if it went badly, it may doom the people to wander in the desert for another lifetime.

But now Joshua is getting the plan from the commander of the Lord's army - it's sure to be awesome. Maybe a new weapon. Maybe a sneak attack. Maybe the angels will just do the fighting. We won't read it but I'll sum up the plan:

Walk around the city walls for 6 days in a row playing trumpets and beating drums. Then on the 7th day have a really big parade and march around the city 7 times and at the end yell real loud.

For a military man like Joshua this must have sounded like the most ridiculous plan. And when we talk to God about our plans and let him run the show the result is often something like this. Something we would have never imagined and with results far greater than we could have ever imagined.

The result of Joshua's time spent talking with Jesus BEFORE the battle was that on the 7th day after the 7th lap and a big shout: the walls came tumbling down and Israel won it's first battle without using any weapons or fighting the battle at all.

We have to realize that our prayers don't move God to side with us, *they move us on to God's side.*

We have to realize that God isn't fighting in our battles, he's leading us into battle, he's not taking sides, he's taking over.

If we're really praying to the God of the universe that saved our souls, is there any other way to pray?

"What message do you have?" - Joshua

"What shall I do Lord" - Paul Acts 22:10

Even though in prayer we do most of the talking, we need to listen to the plans God has for us and be willing to do anything- or do we spend our prayers telling God what we'll do or even worse, all the things we want him to do for us?

We sing, "I surrender all" but maybe we should sing, " I surrender nothing without a fight" - Saying Jesus is Lord means we step down from our commanding post and let him take us through the battles as crazy and out of control that might seem.

Maybe this is why some of our battles are so tough. We aren't just fighting the sickness or the heartbreak or the persistent temptation or the hardhearted friend. We're also fighting God for control of the situation. A battle on two fronts with God on one of the fronts is a battle we'll surely lose. Let's give up our will in prayer and watch as he fights our battles his way.

Is Jesus in control:

Marriage, family, finances, schedule, what you watch and read, relationships...prayer puts the commander in his right place.

And the commander knows how to be victorious with our prayers:

Went to Israel and didn't visit the walls of Jericho - because there's nothing to see. By now they're just piles of sand. God's plan, as crazy as it seemed was right. Joshua just needed to submit just as he did.

Is there an area where you refuse to submit. Take off your shoes, understand the holiness of a conversation with God and DO WHAT HE SAYS.

That's the prayerperation we all need to take.

2) Do nothing without prayer

Our next lesson on prayer from the life of Joshua comes from a moment when Joshua failed to pray and therefore failed in a big way.

The incident is known as the Gibeonite Deception and it occurs in Joshua 9.

The Gibeonites were on the list of places to be conquered but they were cunning. They sent a delegation to Joshua to ask for a treaty. But they made it look like they were from far away. Let's pick up here:

Joshua 9:8-15

The deception worked! They flattered Joshua. Joshua interviewed, questioned, even sampled the bread. He did all he could to test and see if these people where who they said they were. Except he didn't pray.

Leonard Ravenhill once said, "The self-sufficient do not pray, the self-satisfied will not pray, the self righteous cannot pray. No one is greater than his prayer life."

Joshua entered into a bad partnership that negatively influenced Israel for hundreds of years.

We have to be so prayerful; especially in relationships: Friendships, dating, marriage, our kid's friends and activities must be bathed in prayer and advice - nothing is a no brainer or done deal. We have to explore all relationships with our number one relationship first.

In regards to marriage, we take God seriously as a church. If we pray about who to marry the answer comes back from God's word: 1 Cor 7:9 "must marry a believer" , 2 Cor 6:14 "do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers"

What if we adopted this mantra for our lives: We can do many things after we pray but we can do nothing before we pray.

Christians have long commented on the necessity of prayer:

Cameron Thompson once said "Heaven must be full of answers to prayer that no one even bothered to ask"

John Bunyan said, "Prayer will make a Christian stop sinning or sin will make a Christian stop praying."

Even Solomon said in Proverbs 3:5-6 "Lean not on your own understanding"

This is why we need a daily prayer time - who knows what big decisions will face us each day? We have to be ready.

Are your prayers, before the moment and in the moment enough to keep you in line with God's will instead of being sucked in by the will of the world around us?

3) Big prayers come with big Addventures

If you aren't having dynamic prayers on a regular basis it may be because of this: there's no adventure to pray about! When we put ourselves out there for God and refuse to be spectator Christians then we'll have awesome prayers.

Joshua was out on the mission field. He was fighting the battles. We've been given a mission. We've even got a dream to make Lansing great for God by having thousands of true disciples of Jesus. Are you in the fight?

When you are in the fight God will really stretch your prayers. You will pray daring prayers because it's life or death for you or your friend. In the middle of the fight you have to take risks because you have to win. If we aren't praying risky, bold prayers is it because we aren't

participating in the life and death struggle that our ancient brothers and sisters lived in and described in the bible. Paul said, I have fought the good fight - Are we content to say that we've watched a good fight?

Here's the ultimate example of stretching your prayer life:

Joshua 10: 9-14

Joshua makes the sun stand still with his prayer.

These are the kind of crazy prayers we pray in the midst of battle. There have been a few situations in the battles for souls that I've been in where I've felt like people just weren't being honest. They look like interrogations but really it's me loving them enough to know that if they hide sin and stay in the dark their souls will be lost. So I keep asking and even saying things that could jeopardize our friendship. But then the truth comes out by the power of God.

I remember praying for people during bible studies where they are learning how to truly be disciples of Jesus but they are being so proud and as they talk I'm listening but I'm also praying in my head - Lord please humble this person, give me scriptures, give me words - and then the tide starts to turn, they humble out. Some are your brothers or sisters today because of bold prayers.

What kind of prayers are you praying?

What kind of miracles are you seeing in your life and the life of your friends?

Get out there this week and go on an adventure. Share your faith with someone who scares you. Start a bible study. Serve someone sacrificially - get something to pray about and watch your prayer life transform!

Close:

We're not going to see the sun stand still but our church is going to stand still for a moment as we do something very different for communion. It's going to stretch many of us out of our comfort zone.

In the first century, the Christians in the bible met for church in each other's homes. We are actually a church of home groups. The first Christians would take communion on the first day of the week in each other's homes. Think about how different that would be. You would actually commune. You'd see who was there and who was missing. You'd get to talk about Jesus and remember him just as Jesus commanded us to do at the last supper. What we do is not wrong, sitting quietly and looking forward and communing with God...but it's different. As I've been reading revelation for our fall series I've been thinking a lot about the 7 churches that John wrote revelation to. We have a good church and we really follow the bible and still, if they were to visit

they would think that things were very different. So today we are going to try to be a little more like them - We are going to experiment - Thank you for trusting me and being willing to always try to grow closer to God.

There's no way this won't be a little awkward: We're going to break up into our home groups right now. I've got a map up for where each group can circle up their chairs. Your group leader will lead you in a thought about the lesson you just heard that will relate it to the cross. Then you can spend time sharing with each other some big, miraculous prayers that you want answered. Then someone or a few people can pray. Then after about 10 minutes the worship team will come up. When the song is playing I want you to take communion together as a home group, then you can join in the song.

John will come up with some closing remarks and then we'll all stand and gather in the middle here and sing a last song before we are free to fellowship.

If you are new - we are all new to this - it's a stretch. You can join in with the person that you came with or you can join my group. I'd love to meet you and have communion with you this morning.

I'll say a prayer and then we'll break up into our groups as a song plays - I know we love to fellowship but let's be in our groups and talking by the end of the song keeping in mind that communion is a solemn celebration.

Outline for group leaders:

At the last supper which was also the first communion, Jesus simply said to his disciples, "Remember me."

Let's spend the next few moments remembering Jesus in light of today's lesson. Can you share a memory you have about Jesus from the gospels where he was adventurous or when he prayed a bold prayer and got a bold answer.

[Spend 2 minutes sharing with one another about Jesus]

What are some big miraculous prayers that you would like the group to pray about this week?

[Spend 2 minutes sharing and writing down prayer requests]

Closing Thought:

Joshua and Jesus actually have the same name in Hebrew and Greek meaning, "He Saves". Joshua brought Israel into the promised land from the desert. Jesus has brought us into new life from death.

Pray and take communion.