

# Living the Story

## A Study through Scripture

### *Introduction:*

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Many of us are familiar with the famous words of Joshua in Joshua 24.15 that read something like this: Choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (If you are not familiar with who spoke them, you at least have probably seen them printed on a plaque or framed decoration in someone's house somewhere.) To fully understand those words, you have to place them within the context of Joshua's speech to the people of Israel found in Joshua 23-24.

Joshua enumerates many of the things God has done for the people, then concludes this litany with his command for the people to choose: God or your own way. If you have been paying close attention to all of the things that have happened since the Israelites left Egypt, you realize—in some ways, more so than the people did—that there is really no choice. Joshua seems to be saying: Here is all of the things God has done for you ... only an idiot would turn away from him now.

I mention that we may realize the lack of choice within the choice because we too often make the same wrong choice. We know God's presence in our life and know all of the great things he has done, yet we too turn to our own ways rather than commit ourselves to him. Why would we do such a thing? And how can we make the right choice when confronted with these types of decisions?

For me, the first verses of chapter 23 in the book of Joshua point out the importance of what we here at South Plains call "One Older." Joshua, the nation's leader at the end of his life, serves as a wise sage to remind the people once again of the power of God in their life and the resultant blessings that come from following God. What would we do without those people in our life?

### *Summary of the Text:*

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Please note the following points in the text for this week:

v. 1: When the author of Joshua points out that Israel has been given rest from her enemies, he wants the reader to be aware of a sense of calm that has come to the people of Israel. The first part of the book describes the people's entry into the land of Canaan and the subsequent battles that happen in order to conquer the land before them. After the battles, the people move into the areas of land they have been given. It is a time of change and even if it is a positive change, it still, I think, wears on the people. (Just think of a time you have moved your family and I think you get the idea!) But, God gives them rest and they are able to relax and enjoy their lives. This is, by the way, when the people most often forget the Lord: times when they seemingly need him least.

v. 2: Compare Joshua's farewell speech with that of Moses found in the book of Deuteronomy. Given what we hear Moses say, it is easy for us to understand the similar way Joshua goes about this. A big difference, however, is that Joshua does not hand over leadership of the nation to an individual, but more or less releases it to the people. (It would be an interesting study to try and determine if this is significant for what we discover happening to the people in the book of Judges.)

v. 3: This is a key verse to our understanding of how Joshua views his role in leading the people and how he thinks the people should understand their history: God has done the great things they have seen! Think about all that has happened to the people since their slavery in Egypt. They have been released after 10 plagues, they crossed the Red

### LESSON #7

**Date:** 10/21/2012

**Text:** Joshua 23.1-11

**The Big Picture:** Joshua ends his reign as the leader of the Israelites much in the same way Moses did, with a time of encouraging the people to follow God. Who has been a person who has encouraged you to always "be careful to love the Lord your God?"

**Materials Needed:** none

Sea even with the Egyptian army in hot pursuit, they have been given food and water (even when they grumbled to get it!), they entered the Promised Land, and they defeated everyone in the land. It would be easy to assume the nation is full of miraculous people, but in reality, this is all God's doing.

v. 5: It appears by Joshua's comments that the cleansing of the land is not entirely complete, but he still understands that God will finish the job he has begun.

v. 6: The command to "be strong" is one repeated five times in the first chapter of Joshua (one time being the negative: do not be afraid...), several times in the latter part of Deuteronomy (in specific instruction to Joshua), and then we hear it again as Joshua is concluding his reign as the leader of the people.

The idea of not turning from the left or the right is a phrase often times seen in Hebrew wisdom literature and is tied to the idea of following the right path unswervingly. Here on the South Plains, we might say instead: Keep it between the ditches.

v. 7: One of the major ways that the Israelites turn from God is through their association with the gods of people around them. This is the reason for God's insistence that the people drive out those people in the lands they are conquering who serve other gods. Through time, those people always manage to influence to the people of Israel to adopt their gods.

v. 9: As if the writer knows the people may question why the Lord should be followed instead of the gods of the other people, he adds a reminder as to the power of God. He drives out people before the Israelites and no one can stand up to them. The Lord fights for the people. That is, we are reminded again, the reason they are as powerful as they are.

v. 11: As a result, they must be careful to love the Lord. The word "careful" seems to me to contain more of a sense of diligence rather than being careful as to how they go about following the Lord. Do not fail, Joshua says, to love God.

My question for our study is this: who is the person (or persons) who reminds you of the great things God has done? Who is the person who has influenced you most to follow God in the way that you do today? How can we use the encouragement of Joshua to the people of Israel to shape how we encourage others?

#### *Preparing for the Group Time:*

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One of the challenges of leading a lesson that focuses on being an influence on people around you is that you will inevitably begin to think of ways you do—or do not—serve as an influencer on the people of your group.

Spend some time this week thinking through ways you are able to spend time with the people in your group encouraging them to mature and grow spiritually. Do you make this a priority? Do you create space in your schedule for this to happen?

I believe that one of the reasons you are leading a group is because you already do these things. I know that we often attach being a mentor to others as a part of the "job description" of leading, but I have seen too many times that it is actually the opposite. You lead because you are a person who influences others. This does not mean there are not times when you have to think through ways to do this better, however. As you prepare to lead a lesson like this week's is a great opportunity to develop ways to encourage others more.

How do you do this? I would do some of the following:

- Follow up with those who have missed group to tell them they are missed and to determine if there is something in their lives that you can help them through.
- Pray for each person in your group weekly, doing so individually by name.
- Seek out times outside of group that you can spend a few minutes with each of your group members.
- As you go through other ministry activities, ask a member of your group to go along with you.

- Send an email or note to each member of your group just to tell them that you are praying they grow in their faith.
- Plan a time to get together (perhaps in addition to your regular meeting time) just for fun and games.

May God bless you as you strive to bless the lives of those people who share their lives with you in group.

## Living the Story

Lesson #7  
Text: Joshua 23.1-11

### *Lesson Outline:*

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Spend a few minutes asking people to share their experiences of reading the word together as a family this past week. Ask them to share the ways they found this time as a moment of growth in their faith. What recommendations would people have to others that would help them do a better job of reading together?

As an icebreaker, ask your group to share with one another a person they wanted to be when they grew up. When they were a kid, who was their hero that they wanted to be like?

Read Joshua 23.1-11 together.

Go through the discussion questions together.

Close your time with prayer.

### *Discussion Questions:*

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Spend a moment or two thinking about the great things that have happened in your life so far.

As you thought about those things, how many of them included the thoughts “God did...” Why do we sometimes forget to acknowledge God as the one who does the good things that have happened in our life?

Why do you think Joshua started his “farewell” speech with a list of the things that God had done for the people? How does this compare to your list?

We are not told specifically how the people of Israel reacted to Joshua’s speech of chapter 23.1-11. How do you think they reacted? How would you have reacted? What do you think they thought about Joshua and his leadership?

Who are the people in your life that remind you of the great things God has done and encourage you to follow God?

How can you be that kind of person for others? What specific ways can you do this this week with people in this group or who are a part of South Plains?

### *For the Children:*

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Children love to share stories about their heroes. Spend time this week beginning your time together asking the children the icebreaker question, but adapt it to: who do you want to be when you grow up? Encourage the children to share who those people are, but also why they want to be the person(s) they have described.

I also think it is important for our children to hear us (that is, adults and parents) talk about the great things God has done. If you recall, early in the book of Joshua we are told of the people stacking 12 stones as a memorial of the power of God, to be used specifically as a reminder for the children. If we are not speaking in language that says: here is God at work, how are they going to understand the ways he is at work?

### *Living the Story:*

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Our opportunity to live this story this week is an encouragement to do one of two things.

The first is to thank the people who have been “Joshua’s” for you. You cannot always create moments where people point to God, but you can share gratitude with those who actually do that for you on a regular basis.

The other opportunity is for you to be a “Joshua” to someone else. Take time this week to encourage someone around you to carefully follow Jesus. You may especially want to try to do this for someone else within your group this week.

*Prayer Time:*

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You may want to spend your prayer time allowing everyone in the group (that wants to) to share a word of thanksgiving for those who have reminded them to faithfully follow Jesus.

*What's Next:*

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The congregational reading for this upcoming week (October 28) will be from Judges 3.7-11. This is covered in *The Story* chapter 8.