

Small Group Guide

MEDITATING ON GOD'S PRESENCE

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

June 29, 2014

Joshua 1:1-9

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciplinarians, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Before Small Group

Weekly Readings for June 30-July 6
Joshua 2-8 and Psalm 123-139

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Joshua)

Background of Joshua: While authorship of this book is unknown, the book's name derives from the name of its main character, Joshua, who was Moses' successor in leading the people of Israel. His name means "Yahweh delivers" or "Yahweh saves," which is an apt title of the book since it describes God's work in defeating the nations of the Promised Land and giving the land to His people. Joshua presents the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give their descendants the land of Canaan, and it describes the military conquests that brought this to pass. Written as a historical book for Israel, Joshua also emphasizes God's sovereignty, omnipotence, and faithfulness to His word, and Joshua 21:43-45 provides a fitting summary of God's character as One who keeps *all* of His promises.

Structure of Joshua:

- Joshua 1-5 describes Israel's preparations before taking the Promised Land.
- Joshua 6-12 depicts the military conquests of the nation.
- Joshua 13-21 explains the distribution of the land among the tribes, highlighting the fulfillment of God's promises to His people.
- Joshua 22-24 records Joshua's final instructions and exhortations to the nation before his death.

This Week in Joshua: Joshua 2-6 focuses on the conquest of Jericho. As in Numbers 13, spies were sent into the land, and the people faced a choice in how they would respond to the report of the spies. Would they repeat history and commit the same sin of rebellion and distrust as their ancestors, or would they trust God's promises? The spies experience protection by a prostitute named Rahab and promise to protect her and her household when they attack the city. Joshua 6:22-25 features the fulfillment of this promise, and Matthew 1:5 indicates that Rahab married into the Israelite nation and became an ancestor of Christ. Rahab's declaration of faith in God in Joshua 2:8-13 bolstered the spies' confidence in the Lord's blessings on His people.

Joshua 3 tells of Israel's entrance to the Promised Land when they crossed the Jordan River on dry land, similar to how they crossed the Red Sea in the Exodus, and in chapter 4 after they have crossed the Jordan, Joshua builds a memorial of twelve stones at Gilgal to remind the people of God's power and provision that they might fear Him (vv. 21-24). Before sending the people to battle, God instructs the Israelites to keep the covenant by circumcising the male Israelites and to celebrate the Passover *in the land* (Josh. 5). Before they could conquer, they needed to obey the commands God had already given to them, especially since none of

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the males had been circumcised since the Exodus (Josh. 5:5). Circumcision, much as baptism is for Christ-followers, was an external sign that the Israelites were part of God's covenant community (see Gen. 17).

Joshua 5:10-12 represents a turning point in the nation. When celebrating the Passover in the land, they looked back to remember God's deliverance from Egypt and how He brought them to the Promised Land as He had promised their ancestors. It affirmed that the God who led them from Egypt would continue to lead them in the conquest of Canaan. This Passover celebration also marked the end of the heavenly supply of manna, a symbol of wilderness living for the nation. Now that they were in Canaan, they ate the fruit of the land.

Holiness links the contents of Joshua 5. Circumcision distinguished the Israelites as God's covenant people. In celebrating the Passover, they remembered God's deliverance of *His people*, and with Joshua's encounter with the captain of the Lord's army, it recalls the burning bush encounter of Exodus 3:1-6 when God tells Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. The encounter reinforced God's selection of Joshua as Moses' successor, and it taught Joshua to recognize the Lord's presence and to trust Him, even when Joshua did not receive the answers to all of his questions (as in vv. 14-15). In the Old Testament, the Angel of the Lord refers to a preincarnate appearance of Christ, but with the figure in Joshua 5:13-15, it is unclear as to whether it is the Lord or an angel.

Joshua 7:1 starkly contrasts with Joshua 6:27. As God promises Israel, they will successfully take the land as long as they remain faithful to the covenant. They should have easily defeated Ai (Josh. 7:2-5), but their defeat shed light on sin in the camp. The sin of one man – Achan – affected the entire nation. Why would Achan and his entire family be put to death because of this sin? The entire nation became defiled by the presence of the stolen items – items devoted to destruction – among them. God withheld His blessing from the nation until the sin was removed and the people sanctified. This is why the whole community of Israel was involved in punishing Achan and his family (vv. 25-26). God had instructed the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites because of their sin (Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:6-23), and when Achan disobeyed God's command concerning the plunder of Jericho, he became like the Canaanites in his actions. Once the nation punished the offender, God reinstated His blessing, giving Israel victory over Ai (Josh. 8). The end of Joshua 8 records Israel obeying God's commands from Deuteronomy 27 for the nation to stand on Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, build an altar and make sacrifices to the Lord, and write the words of the law.

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Psalms)

Background & Structure of Psalms: God used many different writers to write Psalms: David, Moses, the sons of Korah, Asaph, etc. The book is arranged in five parts, and this arrangement occurred after the people of Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian exile. A doxology concludes each book or arrangement of psalms (Psalm 41:13 for Book 1, Psalm 72:18-19 for Book 2, Psalm 89:52 for Book 3, Psalm 106:48 for Book 4, and Psalm 150:6 for Book 5), and the entire book of Psalms climactically ends with a grand doxology of several psalms (Ps. 146-150).

- Book 1: Psalms 1-41
- Book 2: Psalms 42-72
- Book 3: Psalms 73-89
- Book 4: Psalms 90-106
- Book 5: Psalms 107-150

This Week in Psalms:

- **Psalm 123-Psalm 134** continues the Psalms of Ascent, which were sung by the Israelites as they traveled to Jerusalem for the three annual festivals (Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement with the Feast of Tabernacles). So in reading these psalms, consider the context of pilgrims traveling with expectation and joy as they prepare to worship God at the sanctuary with the rest of the nation.
- A declarative praise psalm, **Psalm 135** calls those who serve the Lord to praise Him for His

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character, His superiority over all other gods, His role as Creator, and His deliverance of His people. It closes with a renewed call to praise in verses 19-21.

- Another declarative praise psalm, **Psalm 136** emphasizes God's steadfast love. To truly grasp the reason for praise, one must understand the definition of this attribute and how God's steadfast love has manifested itself in His relationship with His covenant people. Also translated "lovingkindness" or "loyal love," the word in Hebrew (khesed) expresses a faithful covenantal love. It is a love that is unconditional and does not depend on the recipient but on the giver. God will remain faithful, good, and loving, even if His people do not.
- Verse 1 indicates that the context for **Psalm 137** is shortly after the Babylonian captivity of Israel. In this psalm, the psalmist remembers life in exile (vv. 1-3), recalls the peoples' response to the taunts of their captors (vv. 4-6), and petitions the Lord to judge the oppressors of His people.
- **Psalm 138** divides into three sections. Verses 1-3 describe the psalmist praising God for His steadfast love, verses 4-6 pronounce that the kings of the earth will praise Him, and verses 7-8 expresses the psalmist's confidence in the Lord's protection and in the fulfillment of His plan.
- **Psalm 139** begins with David's recognition of God's omniscience (He's all-knowing) in verses 1-6, continues with an emphasis on God's omnipresence (He's everywhere) in verses 7-12, and contains a beautiful description of God's omnipotence (He's all-powerful) as Creator in verses 13-18. Verses 19-24 contain a petition for God to judge the wicked and the motivations of the psalmist in offering this prayer. Such abhorrence for evil and evil men comes after great reflection on the character of God.

During Small Group

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for His ever-faithful presence in each of our individual lives as well as our corporate life as a faith family. Ask Him to grow our trust in His Word and promises. Pray for God's clear guidance in where He is leading us. Ask Him to grant us His strength and courage to follow Him wherever He leads. Thank God for the gift of His Word. Meditate on God's promises and commands in Joshua 1:1-9 and reflect on how they apply to our own lives.*

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- *Pray for Our City: This week, we are praying for one of our partner ministries, Alabama Baptist Children's Home (alabamachild.org). They provide services such as Family Care Homes for homeless mothers and children, Pathways Professional Counseling for families, training and support for foster care parents and children, and seminars on child and family issues. We are also praying for Shades Mountain Independent Church and Harry F. Walls III, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week, we are praying for Brook Hills member organization, SPEAR International. SPEAR International exists to encourage, equip, and empower believers worldwide to fulfill their role in the Great Commission. SPEAR primarily serves in Kenya, Cuba, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. Join us this week as we pray for SPEAR, their leadership, and the work God is doing in and through their ministry. We are also praying for our Short-Term teams serving Minneapolis and Greece.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

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Joshua 1:1-9

When God is With You...

- You have confidence amidst uncertainty.
- You have strength amidst weakness.
- You have courage in the face of fear.
- You have success according to Scripture.
- You have hope in the face of despair.

Message Summary

God's instructions to Joshua in Joshua 1 include the command to meditate on His Word both day and night. Meditation is more than just reading God's Word; it involves filling our mind with His truth, contemplating the meaning of His Word, and allowing it to transform our lives. Meditation leads us to absorb God's Word and leads to greater spiritual impact in the believer's life and relationship with God.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

As the leader, there are at least three directions the small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully consider what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meetings could also vary with each week, so if one week's sermon prompts a lot of thought and discussion, option one could be what the group does that week while the next week could be

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different. As the leader, feel the freedom to take all or just some of the content in this guide and do what is best for your group.

- *Using the discussion questions below, the small group time can focus on discussing the sermon and how to apply it.*
- *The group can discuss the Bible readings from the past week. If choosing this route, ensure that the group does not simply discuss information but also focuses on how to apply what they have learned from the Bible readings. The information in the "Where We Are in the Story" section can assist the leader in knowing the background and context for the readings.*
- *Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day's readings and discuss them. So if the group meets on Monday, then you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from brookhills.org.*

Because of the focus of this sermon, there are two directions you can take during small group. One option involves centering on how to meditate on Scripture. One idea for how to do this includes working through the first six discussion questions below and using the REAP principles discussed on the Guide to Personal Worship (download at brookhills.org under the 2014 Bible Reading Plan rotating feature). Or during small group, you can practice meditating on a passage of Scripture together. Use Joshua 1:1-9 again or select one of the passage from the Bible Reading Plan. Allow the group to work through the passage together either as a whole group or in smaller groups. Focus time discussing how the group members can meditate on God's Word during this next week. How will they incorporate meditation into their time with God this week?

The other option for small group is to focus on the topic of today's sermon, which is God's presence and how this reality affects how we live. Utilize the last five discussion questions below to guide time together and spend time praying for each other and praising God for His constant presence in our lives.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- What is meditation? What is the goal? How is the meditation that Scripture references different than the mystical type of meditation of Eastern religions such as Buddhism?
- Why is meditation an important discipline for the believer to practice? What does it look like to meditate on a regular basis? Today, what will this look like for you?
- Read Joshua 1:8. What is the difference between reading the Bible and meditating on it? How does meditate affect the believer's relationship with God?
- What prevents us from letting the Word soak into us when we read it? What are reasons for why we do not meditate?
- How can we deal with distractions that come when we try to meditate on God and His Word?
- What are the dangers or results of not meditating on Scripture? Read James 1:22-25. How can we avoid this tendency to hear the Word and to walk away from it without remembering or obeying it?
- How does God's presence *with* the Christian create strength and courage *in* the Christian? What effect does knowing God is with you have on you?

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- What types of uncertainty do you have in your life? What does it look like to have confidence in uncertainty? How do you trust God in times of uncertainty?
- Read Joshua 1:5-6, 9. What types of things do you fear? Why do you fear them?
- How can you respond with faith when fear rises up inside of you? Why shouldn't we fear?
- What types of situations in your life seem hopeless? Why do we despair? How can we face such feelings with faith? What do we have hope about according to Scripture? List these truths and Scriptures. How can you share this hope with others, especially if they are in a difficult season?