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Series: *Joshua*

Title: *A Call to Faith*

Scripture: Joshua 1:1-9

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I want to begin by showing you a quick video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_wqjY_okek

Have you ever felt like this guy---like your life was a feeble attempt to “*keep all the plates spinning?*” You know what I mean.

- There’s the “*parenting plate*”---making sure your kids have what they need and that you get them where they need to go.
- There’s the “*financial plate*”---always making sure you have enough income to cover your outgo.
- There’s “*the work plate*”---the increasing workload, long hours, longer commutes, etc.
- There’s the “*health plate*”---eating right and finding time to exercise.
- There’s the “*home life plate*”---keeping your house clean, the laundry done, etc.

I could go on because life has a lot of plates to keep spinning doesn’t it? I mean, we all deal with times when we feel overwhelmed, like one or more plates is about to fall. And if you can relate, then pay close attention because today we begin the study of a book of the Bible that deals with a man who I believe experienced this feeling of being overwhelmed---especially in today’s text.

His name is Joshua and we can learn from his example. Take your Bibles and turn to the sixth book in the Old Testament. This morning I want us to look at the first nine verses of chapter one. If, you are able, I would ask that you stand in respect for God’s Word as it is read.

1 - After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide:

2 - “Moses My servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

3 - I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

4 - Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

5 - No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

6 - Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the LAND I swore to their ancestors to give them.

7 - 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.

8 - 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.

9 - Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

If you were Joshua, hearing God say all these things, wouldn’t YOU feel overwhelmed, like the task you were about to take on contained too many plates? I think this is why God said to him THREE TIMES--- “**Be strong and courageous.**” The Bible tells us God knows our thoughts---so repeatedly He had to in essence say, “*Hang in there, Joshua, it’s going to be okay.*”

In my mind at this moment Joshua is so overwhelmed that he feels like a frightened little boy.

In fact, it seems to me that in verse 9 God speaks to him in Father-to-son terms and says, *“Don’t be terrified Joshua; don’t be afraid; don’t be discouraged. All this may seem overwhelming but don’t worry, I’m going to be with you every step of the way.”*

Another indication of his fear is in verse 18 after Joshua gives one of his first orders. I mean, the people themselves must have seen their new leader’s knees knocking because they said, *“Hey, don’t worry about it! We’ll obey you. Just be strong and courageous.”*

So, it’s fairly clear that Joshua was feeling a bit overwhelmed at this point in his life. He was afraid. Reminds me of a story I heard of about a sergeant in a parachute regiment. He was a seasoned jumper and one day he found himself sitting next to a lieutenant in the plane who was fresh from jump school. The Lieutenant looked a bit pale so as they approached their jump zone the sergeant leaned over and said, *“Are you scared, sir?”* The lieutenant replied, *“No just a bit apprehensive.”* The sergeant asked, *“Well, what’s the difference?”* And the lieutenant replied, *“Apprehensive means I’m scared with a university education.”*

Well whichever word you want to use, Joshua was it. And several things contributed to this fear or apprehension that threatened to overwhelm him.

A. First, I think it finally sank in that he had been chosen to succeed Moses himself!

Now, he’d known this would eventually happen, but I don’t think it really hit him until now.

And can you imagine what that felt like?

- Think what Joshua must have thought when he realized that he was to fill the shoes of the amazing man God had used to bring the entire two-million-member, Hebrew nation out of bondage?!
- Try to imagine the thoughts that must have gone through Joshua’s head when it finally sank in that he was taking the place of a man who spoke to God in the burning bush, the man God used to force mighty Pharaoh to set his entire slave population free.
- Think how he felt to be the successor of the man who stretched out the rod and divided the Red Sea, the man who had received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, the man whose face had glowed with the glory of God!

Joshua had big shoes---or rather sandals---to fill didn’t he?!

I remember in my “immature” early years in ministry, when I took a church staff position, I would always secretly hope my predecessor had done a bad job; that way I’d look good. I mean, it can be quite threatening to follow a successful, much-loved person can’t it!? Well imagine how it felt to Joshua to realize he had to succeed Moses. It was a scary thought indeed!

B. Add to that Joshua’s understanding that it was now his responsibility to claim THE LAND that had been promised to the Hebrew people 500 years earlier.

This land that, as verse 4 says would *“...extend from the desert [in the south] to Lebanon [in the north], and from the great river, the Euphrates [in the east] to the Great Sea on the west.”* This chunk of land was the single-minded focus of these millions of people who had been traveling now for four decades. We know this--we know it was and had been their focus because the word **“land”** is found eighty-seven times in Joshua and nearly 200 times in Deuteronomy. It was what everyone talked about. All they cared about was finally getting to and claiming this promised land had been on every Jewish individual’s mind for centuries. For over 500 years the Hebrew people---this nation without a country---had waited to claim this land as their own. And to fully comprehend why this would make Joshua feel overwhelmed we need to understand THE IMPORTANCE of this real estate. The prophet Ezekiel said that this piece of property---that is about the size of California---was to be the center of the nations, the center of the entire world. And the Hebrew word that we translate

“center” literally means “naval” suggesting that the land of Israel was to be the “lifeline” between God and this world.

And, it was indeed a lifeline in the sense that God had chosen it to be the “stage” on which the drama of redemption would be presented. This is the land where prophets would preach foretelling the coming of the Messiah. It’s where He---Jesus---would be born, live, be crucified, and rise again. Well, imagine how ole Joshua felt as he realized that it was now his job to finally lead the people to conquer and claim this vital, long-promised LAND! Wouldn’t that thought overwhelm you a bit?!

C. And then another factor in his apprehension at this point was the fact that Joshua knew, perhaps better than anyone, the kind of burden he now faced as LEADER.

I mean, he knew the kind of people it was now his job to govern and lead. He knew, by experience, that they were a group of stubborn, stiff-necked people known for their murmuring, complaining, backsliding, and wishing they were back where they came from. Of course, in the past, he could always refer complaints like these to Moses. He could say, “Let’s take that to Moses. He’ll deal with it.” But no longer! No, now the buck stopped at Joshua’s tent flap!

In fact, as verse 12 tells us, his second command as leader was to deal with some of this stubbornness that was so often found in the Hebrew people. He had to go and remind the tribes of Gad and Reuben and half of the tribe of Manasseh-Hebrews who had chosen NOT to live in the promised land---he had to remind them of their pledge to send troops to help conquer it. He had to in essence initiate a draft. He had to tell them, “Hey guys, Moses said you could stay on this side of the Jordan and raise your cattle but remember, the deal was for you to send soldiers---to help the rest of your people conquer this land God has given us, so all able-bodied you men get your swords. Lock and load---we’re about to go to war.”

Now, before we go any further in our study of this book, let’s remind ourselves exactly who this Joshua was. You may not be familiar with him because the fact is, he’s often overlooked. Most people who follow in the footsteps of a particularly prominent individual are. I mean, who other than Jeopardy James, remembers the president after Abraham Lincoln, or the prime minister who followed Winston Churchill? Successors are generally obscured by the famous leaders who came before them and this often happens to Joshua; we tend to forget him because he served in the huge shadow of Moses. In fact, this may be why the book we are going to be studying for the next couple months is called by his name. Perhaps it is God’s way of saying, “Don’t overlook My servant Joshua? He was extraordinary. He was faithful and hardworking, wholly given to My service. You could learn a thing or two from Joshua’s story.”

And there is indeed a great deal we can learn from Joshua’s life. Author Philip Keller puts it this way,

“[Joshua] has seldom been given the full credit he deserves as perhaps the greatest man of FAITH ever to set foot on the stage of human history. In fact, his entire brilliant career was a straightforward story of simply setting down one foot after another in quiet compliance with the commands of God.”

I mean, Joshua is a guy who would understand this year’s vision for he learned that FAITH is INDEED much better than 2020! So, let’s take a minute to review the life of this great, but somewhat unknown man.

A. When we first meet him in the Bible, Joshua is a SLAVE.

Like hundreds of thousands of Hebrews, Joshua spent the first part of his life suffering under the cruelty of the Egyptian taskmasters. Joshua belonged to the tribe of Ephraim and the fact that he was the firstborn son of Nun, tells us two things. First, as the eldest, his life was in danger the night of the Passover. And then his

survival also tells us that he obeyed God on that night of the final plague. Joshua followed His instructions and put the blood of a Lamb on the doorpost of his house so that the death angel would pass over.

B. So Joshua began as a SLAVE, but he went on to become a great SOLDIER.

In fact, the first official recorded act of Joshua in the Bible is his leading the Hebrew army to defeat the Amalekites when they attacked Israel about two months after their exodus from Egypt. Do you remember that story from Exodus 17? Moses stood on a hill overlooking the battlefield and raised his hands as a sign of God's blessing. As long as his hands were raised, the Israelites were winning, but when he grew tired and lowered them, the Amalekites would begin to prevail.

Aaron and Hur, who were with Moses, saw this and realized what was happening so they had him sit on a large rock while they stood on either side and supported his arms. They did this until sunset, by which time the armies of the Amalekites were overcome.

This experience on the battlefield was part of Joshua's preparation for leadership. It taught him that it is God Who blesses us with victory in the battles of life. By the way, as we study this book that bears his name, we'll see that Joshua was not only a soldier but was apparently a GENERAL with exceptional military skills. I mean, he knew how to lead an army into battle. Perhaps, like Moses, Joshua received his education in the form of military training from the Egyptians. Maybe his assignment as a Hebrew slave was to be the military aid to one of their generals. In any case he was indeed an exceptional soldier. In fact, General Douglas MacArthur once listed Joshua among the truly great generals of world history.

So, Joshua was a slave, a soldier...

C. ...and then, as I have already said, Joshua is also known as the Moses' SIDE-KICK or aide.

As the number two man in the Hebrew nation, he accompanied Moses up to Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Then Joshua went with Moses when he judged the people for making the golden calf. (Exodus 32:17) During Israel's wilderness journey, Moses had a special tent set up outside the camp where he could meet with God. It was Joshua's responsibility to stay at the tent and guard it.

D. ...and you may remember that the Bible also says that Joshua was a SPY.

When Israel first arrived at the border of the Promised Land at a place called Kadesh Barnea, God commanded Moses to appoint twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan and Joshua was among them. After forty days of investigating the land, the spies returned to Moses and reported that the land was a wonderful place. Just as God promised, it was a land flowing with milk and honey. But that was the good news. The bad news was that ten of the spies discouraged the people by saying that Israel wasn't strong enough to overcome the residents of this promised land. Only two of the spies---Caleb and Joshua---encouraged the people to trust God and move in. Tragically the people listened to the faithless ten spies and their act of unbelief and rebellion delayed the conquest of the land for forty years.

Only Caleb and Joshua survived that four-decade march, empowered to do so by God as a reward for their faith in Him. Okay now that we've been formally "introduced" to Joshua, let's get back to our text. Remember, at this point He faces an overwhelming task. How was he to do it? How was he to be strong and courageous under the burden of all that now lay on his shoulders? How was he to keep all those plates spinning? And---how do we do that?

(1) First, Joshua would tell us, we need the WORD of God.

Look at verse 8 where God says to Joshua, ***"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; 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.” Or to paraphrase, *“Here’s how to keep all the plates spinning---read, learn, meditate on My written Word. Follow it’s guidance.”* In other words, Joshua would get the help he needed for the overwhelming task in front of him from the Scriptures. He would get the power and the courage and the guidance necessary for dealing with the overwhelming responsibilities that faced him every morning by reading, studying, and believing its promises. The precepts and principles found in “The Book of Law” would give him the wisdom he needed to get this overwhelming job done.

Now, of course Joshua didn’t have our Bible---most of it had not been written yet---but he did have the first five books of the Old Testament. That is the “book of Law” that is referenced in verse 8. You see, during the years of his leadership, Moses had kept a written record of God’s words and acts. Deuteronomy 31:9 tells us he had committed this record to the care of the priests. But please note God was saying it wasn’t enough for the priests to carry and guard this precious book. No, Joshua was to take time to read it daily and make it a part of his inner person by meditating on it.

And to deal with our own times of overwhelming fear we need to do the same thing. As Psalm 1:1-3 says, ***“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the Law of the Lord and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by the water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”***

This meditating on Scripture is what Paul was talking about when he told the Ephesians that their minds needed to be ***“washed with water through the Word [of God.]”*** (Ephesians 5:26) It’s our commitment every week when we talk about letting, ***“the WORD of Christ dwell in us richly.”***

You see, studying God’s Word---meditating on it---letting it DWELL IN US---cleanses false beliefs and attitudes and misguided plans---things that combine to make us afraid and overwhelmed. It rids our minds of these things.

I like the word picture that author Donald Whitney uses. He says that meditating on the Word of God is like making a cup of tea. He writes: *“Your mind is the cup of hot water and the tea bag represents your intake of Scripture. Hearing God’s Word is like one dip of the tea bag into the cup. Some of the tea’s flavor is absorbed by the water, but not as much as would occur with a more thorough soaking of the bag. Reading, studying, and memorizing God’s Word are like additional plunges of the tea bag into the cup. The more frequently the tea enters the water, the more permeating its effect. Meditation, however, is like immersing the bag completely and letting it steep until all the rich tea flavor has been extracted and the hot water is thoroughly tintured reddish brown. Meditation on Scripture is letting the Bible brew in the brain. Thus, we might say that as the tea colors the water, meditation likewise ‘colors’ our thinking. When we meditate on Scripture it colors our thinking about God, about God’s ways and His world, and about ourselves.”*

In short, meditating on Scripture helps us think RIGHTLY---it helps us have an accurate perspective on the things that make us feel overwhelmed. With the help of God’s Word, we look at them from the perspective of God’s greatness and power and that leads to the second thing Joshua’s experience can teach us. He would say, to have the faith to NOT feel overwhelmed in life, we not only need the Word of God...

(2) We need the God of the WORD.

God reminded Joshua that he wouldn’t face these overwhelming challenges alone. Almighty God would be with him. In verse 5 He says, ***“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor***

forsake you.” Look at verse 9. God says to Joshua, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

You know, the reason we feel overwhelmed in life is because we don't feel capable on our own. So, God tells Joshua, *“You don't have to be capable! I will be with you and I am ALL-capable! I can and will handle anything you face!”* The morning after the earthquake in Puerto Rico, we read from the 40th chapter of Isaiah---a passage of Scripture devoted to proclaiming the truth that God is “all-capable”---the truth that God is GREAT. It says, ***“God is so great that He holds the oceans in the palm of His hands and marks off heaven by a span. The nations are as a drop in a bucket...a speck of dust on scales. He knows the stars by name and calls them forth.”***

And, you know, there is a sort of “holy joy” when we realize all of this. I mean, imagine:

- A God with the mighty seas turning in the cup of His hands...
- A God with the stars standing at attention each night when He calls their name.
- A God for whom the nations of the world---nations as powerful as the U.S. and as scary as Iran---to our GREAT God---all the world's nations are nothing more than a speck of fine dust on a pair of scales.

Our God---the one TRUE God---is GREAT!

Listen. The way not to feel overwhelmed is to realize that God, Who is ABOVE everything that threatens to overwhelm us---even earthquakes---is with us. The reason we feel overwhelmed so often is we forget how BIG God is. And when we do that---when we forget God's character---His attributes---when we forget that God is truly ALL-MIGHTY---and ALL-KNOWING---and ALL-LOVING---we in essence, SHRINK God. John Ortberg points out that when we do that there are consequences and none of them good.

- We live in a constant state of fear and anxiety because everything depends on us, and our mood will be governed by whatever circumstances hit us that day.
- If you and I live with a shrunken God, I don't pray when we have a need, because we're not really sure, to be honest, that God makes a difference and that prayer matters.
- If we live with a shrunken God, we will become a slave to whatever other people think of us, because we don't live in the security of a big God's acceptance.
- If we face temptation to speak deceitful words in order to avoid trouble, We'll do it.
- Or if we can get credit for something at work that we haven't earned, and we don't trust there's a God Who sees what is done in secret and will one day reward, we'll do it.

When we shrink God, we pray without faith, worship without awe, serve without joy, and suffer the overwhelming times of life without hope. Meditating on Scripture, spending time in prayer, all this reminds us that God is greater than anything we face and that He knows our fears and that He is WITH US.

Almost 40 years ago a movie came out called, *My Bodyguard*. It's the story of the teenage son of a wealthy father is forced to go to a public school. On his first day the teen learns---the hard way---that the school is “run” by a bully and his gang---who force the students to give them their lunch money as “protection.” After suffering several beatings the teen hires his own BIGGER bodyguard. Watch this scene: Edited CLIP from MY BODYGUARD: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QexN6K0kq5I>

This teen learned he need not feel overwhelmed by the bullies in school because his bodyguard was bigger and more powerful than them. Did you notice the relief on his face and the faces of the other teens who had lived overwhelmed by their fear of the bully? The same principle helps us. We learn that God is bigger than the things that overwhelm us, that He loves us and is with us ALWAYS. As a Christian, we must remember that we

never face things alone. Remember those words from Psalm 46? ***“God is our refuge and strength, an EVER-PRESENT help in trouble...therefore we will NOT FEAR, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea...”***

And how about Isaiah 43 where God says, ***“Fear not....when you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you....for I am the Lord your God.”*** God is WITH us! Everyone think of that which threatens to overwhelm you this morning. Now think, remember that All-Mighty God is WITH US and will help us. There is NOTHING that can separate us from His love---there is NOTHING He cannot and will not use for our good and His glory. Now everyone give a sigh of relief!

Let us pray.