

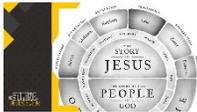


# Flawed, but Following

Joshua #8 • February 22, 2026

## Opening

On Wednesday, as I was leaving church after Nite Life, I looked across the highway and saw about as much traffic as you'll ever see in Tonganoxie. Our church was letting out while West Haven was dismissing (both typical Wednesday activities)...but added to the mix were our Catholic friends across the way. Sacred Heart's parking lot was crazy busy! I had a moment of confusion, wondering why so many were there. Quickly, though, I remembered the occasion: it was **Ash Wednesday**.



You and I have talked about this before. Last year, I mentioned that our church doesn't engage much with the traditional Christian calendar. Our "holy calendar" here usually consists of only a handful of days. Our small roster of specifically Christian holidays is limited to **Christmas**, **Good Friday** and **Easter Sunday** alone... plus baptisms and baby dedications. The rest of the year is unstructured. We as a church aren't tied to many traditions.

Meanwhile, many of our fellow believers across the globe have entire **seasons** with special **ceremonies** and **traditions** to go with their special days...all of them man-made inventions, ways to remember and consider spiritual truth.



On this week's "Ash Wednesday," many Christians showed up to work or school with a cross of ashes on their foreheads. The ashes (made of burned up palm leaves from last year's Easter celebrations) were placed there as part of the beginning of the season of "Lent," a time of reflection and repentance for forty days leading up to Easter. The practice reminds Christians of human mortality and the importance of reconciling with God.

One Catholic believer stated it this way:

*"We all have an opportunity to return more deeply to our Father. We all have an opportunity to more fully come home to the God who loves us. It all starts on Ash Wednesday...when we receive ashes on our foreheads in*

*the Sign of the Cross, remembering that **we are dust and to dust we shall return.**"<sup>1</sup>*

Ash Wednesday is a time to remember that we stand before a perfect and immortal Father as flawed and mortal beings. The day is a lesson in humility...and we ALL need reminders to be humble!

Humility can accompany the traditional practice of marking the forehead with the shape of a cross; humility can also come from studying God's Word. Today, we won't do the former (no ash crosses for you!)...but we will do the latter, as we open God's Word to the book of Joshua. This morning, I invite you to join me in Joshua 9-10 as part of our continuing series studying this Old Testament book.

Our God is the same yesterday today and forever (Hebrews 13:8)...so these Old Testament lessons continue to teach us relevant truth. And some of the truth we need today relates to humility. It relates to **flawed humanity**.

It forces us to ask, *"How do we live in light of those flaws?"*

## Flawed Figures

In Joshua 9, we find people and situations that embody the same kinds of flaws we share.

### A Flawed Claim

This story features a flawed claim – a claim that requires a bit of backstory to understand.

If you've been with us for the past few weeks, you've heard the stories from previous chapters of Joshua. The nation of Israel enters the Promised Land of Canaan, ready to receive the land God had sworn to give them. Led by Joshua, the people enjoy miraculous success as they cross the Jordan River and defeat the impenetrable fortress of Jericho. God's power is on full display, and the people are **strong and courageous** as they follow Him!

Yet, immediately after their success, they find failure. At the battle of Ai, sin causes them to stumble. God withdraws his help until that sin is addressed and punished. We saw a public cost to private sin! But once it is addressed,

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<sup>1</sup> [Lent 2026: When is Ash Wednesday? Why Christians wear ashes, give things up](#)



the battle resumes, and victory is won. Israel is ready to follow through with God's plan to drive out or destroy anyone who is in the land, paving the way for a nation uninfected by the sins and idolatry of its current residents.

Now, the surrounding city-states must decide how to respond to Israel.



*“Now all the kings west of the Jordan River heard about what had happened. These were the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, who lived in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea as far north as the Lebanon mountains. These kings combined their armies to fight as one against Joshua and the Israelites.”*

(Joshua 9:1–2, NLT)

Everyone was ready to fight! Except for one town. The town of Gibeon, located a few miles NW of Jerusalem, heard the news about Israel's advance, and they took a different kind of action. They sought peace...through deception!



*“But when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to deception to save themselves. They sent ambassadors to Joshua, loading their donkeys with weathered saddlebags and old, patched wineskins. They put on worn-out, patched sandals and ragged clothes. And the bread they took with them was dry and moldy. When they arrived at the camp of Israel at Gilgal, they told Joshua and the men of Israel, “We have come from a distant land to ask you to make a peace treaty with us.”*

*The Israelites replied to these Hivites, “How do we know you don't live nearby? For if you do, we cannot make a treaty with you.”*

*They replied, “We are your servants.”*

*“But who are you?” Joshua demanded. “Where do you come from?”*

*They answered, “Your servants have come from a very distant country. We have heard of the might of the Lord your God and of all he did in Egypt. We have also heard what he did to the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River—King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan (who lived in Ashtaroth). So our elders and all our people instructed us, ‘Take supplies for a long journey. Go meet with the people of Israel and tell them, “We are your servants; please make a treaty with us.”’*

*“This bread was hot from the ovens when we left our homes. But now, as you can see, it is dry and moldy. These wineskins were new when we filled them, but now they are old and split open. And our clothing and sandals are worn out from our very long journey.”*” (Joshua 9:3–13, NLT)

Talk about flawed humanity! Gibeon was **clever as they devised this ruse**. They worked hard to fool Joshua – their props and costumes were spot on.

And they weren’t wrong in their assessment of the situation! They were **correct about the God they feared**. He *is* mighty! He *did* miracles! He *is* powerful!

But their fatal flaw was that they were *lying* to get into God’s good graces! Instead of approaching God (or even the God-fearing Israelites) and asking how they could repent and worship Yahweh, too, they instead resorted to trickery...to deception...to fraud.

The Gibeonites were flawed. But the Gibeonites weren’t the only flaws on display here.

## A Flawed Covenant

This story also features a flawed covenant!



*“So the Israelites examined [the Gibeonites’] food, but they did not consult the Lord. Then Joshua made a peace treaty with them and guaranteed their safety, and the leaders of the community ratified their agreement with a binding oath.”* (Joshua 9:14–15, NLT)

Joshua’s interview was quick, and not very thorough. He didn’t do a full background check, nor did the leaders consult references. They just said, *“Meh, looks okay.”*

(Please know that while peace is usually good, it was not good in this case!)

God had already given instruction on how to handle the inhabitants of the land. Here’s what He told Moses:



*““Make no treaties with them or their gods. They must not live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me. If you serve their gods, you will be caught in the trap of idolatry.”*” (Exodus 23:32–33, NLT)

Don't make friends! That was the command. Yet Joshua and the people failed...for one huge reason:



*"...they did not consult the Lord." (Joshua 9:14, NLT)*

A rash decision. Trusting self instead of trusting God. Joshua, for all his success and wisdom in previous chapters, shows himself to be flawed.

## A Familiar Conundrum

If the flaws of chapter 9 feel familiar, they should. You and I, too, are flawed! We can relate to the Gibeonites and the Israelites!

Raise your hand if you've ever (in life, if not in the past 24 hours)...

- Misled someone for your own gain
- Failed to consult God before a big decision
- Chosen to act in a way that disregards what God asked
- Tried to look better than you are

Raise your hand if any of these behaviors listed in 2 Timothy 3 have crossed your hands, lips, or heart:



*"For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly..."*

(2 Timothy 3:2-5, NLT)

Yeah... We are flawed. And we don't need Ash Wednesday to remind us!

*"How do we live in light of those flaws?"*

## Following Anyway

That question makes me think about a story we once discussed in a Cultural Anthropology class at Bible college. Our book contained a story:



A man with several wives had decided to become a Christian. Now what? The local missionary had gone out to his compound to talk to him, since Christians (usually) frown upon multiple spouses (i.e. that ol’ “one man, one woman” thing).

*“What can I do?” the man said. “I married these women. They are all my wives. Do I divorce them? Is that the Christian answer? Would that honor God? And what happens to them and their family? Do I break up these kids from their siblings? Which wives will I have to kick out and stop supporting, causing them to be shunned in our village?”*

In other words, you don’t fix sin... or the aftermath of sin... by adding more sin!



That African man carried the flaws of his past...and now the best he could do was to try to **follow God anyway**, even in the chaos of his previous choices.

Just like us, he needs to *follow God, despite his own flaws!*

## Grace for the Gibeonites

Joshua had to do the same. He was in chaos from his choices! A few days after they made the covenant, the Gibeonites’ deception leaked out. How embarrassing! The leaders knew they had messed up, and the people started talking and grumbling about their mistake.



*“But the leaders replied, “Since we have sworn an oath in the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel, we cannot touch them. This is what we must do. We must let them live, for divine anger would come upon us if we broke our oath.” (Joshua 9:19–20, NLT)*

They were flawed...and now all they could do was **follow God, despite those flaws!**

So, they honored their word to God, and the Gibeonites got to live. The tricksters were allowed to remain among the people as servants – supplying water and lumber for the community. The Israelites’ choice to honor God allowed them to extend grace to the people of Gibeon.

## Saving the Servants

Later, they got a chance to follow God yet again.

The kings from surrounding towns looked on Gibeon as traitors for joining the Israelite invaders. So, at the first chance they got, five kings banded together and went on the attack. They surrounded Gibeon, and things looked bleak. But a message was sent.

*Gibeon calls for aid...and Israel will answer.<sup>2</sup>*

*“So Joshua and his entire army, including his best warriors, left Gilgal and set out for Gibeon.” (Joshua 10:7, NLT)*

Despite making a flawed covenant – a covenant they should never have entered – they choose to stay faithful to it. They honored their promises and honored their God in the process.

## Our Constant Challenge

It is easy to give up once you’ve failed!

Do you remember Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal son? In Luke 15, Jesus tells this memorable story.

*A young man asks for his inheritance early. He goes off and squanders it all, making terrible choices along the way. He ends up broke, suffering during a famine, feeding slop to pigs to try to make ends meet.*

Talk about flaws! He has flaws of character. Flaws of family. Flaws of intellect. Flaws of morality.

*Can you relate? Our flaws are just as bad, whether it’s a battle for sobriety that you keep losing, or a temper that you just can’t keep under control, or a parent that you treat like an idiot, or a broken friendship you just can’t forgive.*

More sin won’t fix it. Giving up won’t undo the past. Instead, all we can do is:

**Follow Him, despite our flaws!**

We come as flawed figures – scarred by sin, with calloused hearts, deaf to His words. And we can’t change the past. We can only obey in the present...and wait for God to act in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Easter egg paraphrase from *Return of the King*



The path of sin and sorrow we've been on only leads to more heartache and misery. The path back to God may be humbling and scary...but it is littered with grace and mercy.

*Follow anyway!*

### **Follow Him, despite your flaws!**

And when you follow, you will find a **faithful Father**, who is ready to welcome you back and accomplish what His will always intended!



## **A Faithful Father**

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son eventually wises up and heads home. He is ready to be rebuked for his many sins...but instead, the waiting Father runs to Him, welcomes him back, and blesses his return!



*“I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’” “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’” “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.”*  
(Luke 15:18–24, NLT)

This is who our God is! He is a faithful Father, ready to bless those who turn from sin and error.



In the story of the Gibeonites, the tricksters don't just get to serve Israel; they get to provide **the supplies that fuel the sacred altar** where sacrifices are given to God (Joshua 10:27)! They merely wanted to be saved from God's wrath, and now they become the ones who support others who offer burnt offerings of repentance themselves!

In the story of the five kings' attack on Gibeon, the same Israelites who failed to inquire of God before now receive direct words from Him.



*“Do not be afraid of them,” the Lord said to Joshua, “for I have given you victory over them. Not a single one of them will be able to stand up to you.”* (Joshua 10:8, NLT)

He strengthens their army, and then He gives them miraculous help. A massive hailstorm takes out more warriors than the Israelite army did (10:11)! And then God uses a miracle involving the sun and moon to aid Joshua’s soldiers (see 10:12ff). The Canaanites, who worshiped nature deities, discovered that their own gods were powerless in this fight against the Israelites!<sup>3</sup>

God takes those small acts of repentance after failure, and He turns them into His own big victories!

## Conclusion

So, in the words of Zechariah 4:10,

*“...do not despise the day of small things....”*

Do not look down on these small moments of repentance and faithfulness after failure. If God’s plans required our constant faithfulness, He would be in trouble! But instead, we have a faithful Father who can take our repentance and our halting steps back to Him...and work miracles in our situations and our hearts!

I know you have flaws. I don’t need an Ash Wednesday cross on your head to be reminded of your mortality and weakness. We are all flawed figures!

**But we need to follow God anyway!** Don’t be stopped by failure. Don’t let the enemy undermine your return to Jesus.

Simply repent – turn away from your sin and mistakes and head back to Him.

**Follow Him, despite your flaws!**

And when you do that,

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<sup>3</sup> Madvig, D. H. (1992). [Joshua](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* (Vol. 3, p. 302). Zondervan Publishing House.





*“...I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” (Philippians 1:6, NLT)*

**Praise be to our faithful Father! Amen? Amen!**



## Prayer

## Invitation

Is there a past mistake you've allowed to define you? What would it mean to trust God with it instead?

Let's leave behind our sins and mistakes. There may still be consequences to live out from your choices, but follow God anyway, despite your flaws!

If you would like prayer as you move past those old choices, I invite you to come forward and let us lift you up and encourage you. Join me up here and share your needs as we all stand and sing.

# Sermon Notes

## Flawed Figures

A Flawed Claim (Joshua 9:1-13)

A Flawed Covenant (Joshua 9:14-15; Exodus 23:32-33)

A Familiar Conundrum (2 Timothy 3:2-5)

## Following Anyway

Grace for the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:16-27)

Saving the Servants (Joshua 10:1-7)

Our Constant Challenge

***Follow Him, despite our flaws!***

## A Faithful Father

(Luke 15:18-24; Joshua 10:8; Zechariah 4:10;  
Philippians 1:6)

# Sermon Discussion Questions

- Where have you seen God turn a flawed situation into something redemptive?
- In Joshua 9:1–13, what stands out to you about the Gibeonites' deception? What does their strategy reveal about their beliefs about God?
- Why was making a treaty with the Gibeonites such a serious mistake in light of Exodus 23:32–33?
- Joshua 9:14 says the leaders “did not consult the Lord.” Why do you think they skipped that step?
- Which flaws in Joshua 9-10 felt most relatable to you: deception, pride, self-reliance, spiritual shortcuts, or something else?
- Why is it tempting to give up after failure instead of continuing to follow God?
- How can repentance be both humbling and freeing at the same time?
- How does God's response in Joshua 10:8–14 show that He had not abandoned Joshua after his mistake?
- Why is it important not to “despise the day of small things” (Zechariah 4:10) as you take small steps back to God after failure?
- How does Philippians 1:6 encourage believers who feel stuck in patterns of failure?
- Is there a past mistake you've allowed to define you? What would it mean to trust God with it instead?