



Courageous #5: Making a Decision

Text: Joshua 3:12-17

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Before the nation of Israel could enter the Promised Land, a major obstacle stood in the way: the Jordan River. But God promised to make a way, as He always had. However, it would require the nation of Israel, led by Joshua, to step out in faith. Once the miracle was performed, God commanded the people to erect a pile of stones, an Ebenezer to remind them of that step of faith and of God's faithfulness and as a tool to teach the generations to come.

1. **Read Joshua 3:1-6.** In what situation do you feel like Joshua right now, able to see your desired future but with a river to cross first? What is your "river"?
2. **Read Joshua 3:7-17.** To step into the water required tremendous faith. What does this passage teach us about why God puts us in situations that require faith? What blessings do we receive when we do?
3. **Read Joshua 4:1-24.** We need reminders, and we need to pass on our faith to the next generation. Share with the group a time you experienced God move in a way that is worthy of not only remembering, but passing on to the next generations in your family to come?
4. We are visual creatures, and we often need symbols to help us remember. (See Study Deeper.) What are some ideas you can share with each other of modern Ebenezers to memorialize for yourself, your family, and future generations what God has done?

Challenge: Often, like the nation of Israel at the Jordan River, we have to step out first, before the miracle. What step do you need to take in order to see God part the River?

Prayer: Pair up with someone from your group. If you have not already, share what you have seen God do that you want to remember, how you intend to create an Ebenezer to help you remember, and what step you feel challenged to take as God leads you into your future. Praise God for what He has done in each other's lives, and pray for the courage to step out in faith. Then check in with each other throughout the week to see how things are going.

STUDY DEEPER

A New Lesson from an Old Hymn

More than 250 years ago, Robert Robinson put quill to paper and composed the words of "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." One of Christendom's most beloved hymns, it stirs the intellectual soul in much the same way modern worship stirs the emotional one. The words are challenging and beautiful.

I've sung this song during worship more than a few times, and the second verse has always seemed puzzling: "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I've come." I think I get the gist of it, but what is an 'Ebenezer'? For some reason I always imagine a scowling old man, angrily brandishing a cane—I suppose I can thank Charles Dickens for that. But the verse always struck me as odd, and no one ever said anything about it; they just sang along, then sat down to quietly listen to the sermon.

A lot changes in 250 years. Though every schoolgirl in the eighteenth century probably knew what an Ebenezer was, that's no longer true. So here's a quick history lesson:

When the Israelites defeated the Philistines at a place called Beth-Car, the prophet Samuel took a stone, stood it up and "named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'" (1 Samuel 7:12, NIV) Ebenezer literally means "stone of help," and Samuel erected it as a reminder for all that God had provided a victory, that He had cared for His children.

Now the words of Robinson's song come into focus. He is placing a monument, something to help him remember that God brought him to this point. He goes on to speak of his desire for heaven and the amazing grace given through Christ. The image drawn should not be one of a miser with a cane, but rather a man on His knees, intentional in his remembrance of the God who saves.

We humans are a forgetful people. It's easy to poke fun at Israel for not remembering God's power, to laugh at the Apostles as they repeatedly don't get it. But despite our cries of "surely not I, Lord," the truth is humanity is still pretty much the same. We believe in God, but stroll through life forgetting He is active. We pray passionately, but don't notice when He answers. We nod our heads to the sound of His commands, only to break them an hour after church.

God has a pretty good idea of human nature, and it's no accident that He commanded His people to celebrate feasts, offer sacrifices and gather in His name. These are all standing stones—Ebenezers—designed to jog our memories so we won't forget what God has done in our lives. The celebration of communion is a perfect example: how often would we meditate on Christ's death and resurrection if it weren't for that?

Ebenezers aren't just big rocks anymore. They're writings, tattoos, songs, rituals. The monuments around us still speak, and good art invites us to hear their stories. As Christians, we work to raise stones in the desert, pieces that silently shout to the world of a God bursting with love. Our paintings reflect the beauty of His creation, our photographs capture the struggles of a fallen world, our films point to the hope of His redemption. This art reminds both artist and audience of the One who invented invention and created creativity.

It is He who inspires above all, and we raise our Ebenezers that we and the world might remember who He is. After all, by His help we've come to this point. And we still need Him to make it the rest of the way.

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