

One of the strangest places I have ever visited is the **Winchester Mystery House** in San Jose, California. It is a Victorian mansion which was once the personal residence of Sarah Winchester, the widow of famous gun maker William Winchester. Construction on the house began in 1884 after Mr. Winchester died of TB. Under the Widow Winchester's guidance, construction proceeded continuously until her death on September 5, 1922. It seems Mrs. Winchester had consulted a medium who convinced her that as long as the house was unfinished, she would remain alive. She also believed the house was haunted by the ghosts of those killed with Winchester rifles so she slept in a different room every night to confuse the spirits who lived in the house. For 38 years, hundreds of carpenters worked day after day with no plans, no architect and no budget. They built and built in a haphazard fashion, doors that opened into mid-air and stairs that went nowhere until 161 rooms, 40 bedrooms, 47 fireplaces later, Mrs. Winchester died.

I think of that house often. Many years ago I was recruited to help build a house that has been 2,000 years in the making. Jesus said, "I will build my church," and He appointed His followers to assist in the project. But there have been times when I felt like I was building the Winchester Mystery House. No plan, programs that go nowhere, ministries tacked on to existing ministries, millions of people building haphazardly hoping God would be pleased. Unfortunately, many of these projects have become museums like the Winchester Mystery House.

How do we keep from becoming a Winchester Mystery House? How can I do my part and accomplish what God has assigned me to do? How can I live out my God-given purpose in Christ every day? That's the question we are going to try and answer next week as we kick off a series that is rooted in the book of Joshua. As we consider this Old Testament book we will see many similarities between the experience of God's people in Joshua's day and our own experiences today.

God's purpose for His people has always been the same - to represent Him and reflect who He is so that all people will be drawn to worship the one true God. Nearly 4,000 years ago, God chose a man named Abraham from whom would come a nation that would be His representatives on earth. As we study the book of Joshua we will see why Israel failed and how God puts the same choice before us that He did before His chosen people - "Choose you this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The title of the series is "From Here To There." Here are a few things we will discover as we study the book of Joshua:

1. God has a "there" for you. God has a plan and a purpose and a place for you. To get to that place, He has to get us from "here" to "there." The book of Joshua begins with these words: "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses." Joshua 1:2-3. God is fulfilling a promise He made to Abraham through Moses to give his descendants a land flowing with milk and honey. But they had to move out and cross the river. So do we. One of our core values at Fellowship is "Get Moving - we challenge each other to discover and act on God's next step for our lives."

Many of the details in the book of Joshua are specific to a particular people at a particular place at a particular time. We are not the physical descendants of Abraham. But we are His spiritual descendants. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him as righteousness. That's the only way to please God. Like Abraham, we too are saved by grace through faith. But our salvation is just the beginning of a rich spiritual heritage. Ephesians 1:3 tells us, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ." God has promised us "every spiritual blessing." Just as God delivered the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt and led them to a place of blessing, He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and is leading us to a place of spiritual blessing. We follow Jesus, our Joshua, who will lead us to the place He has prepared for us, a place of great blessing and purpose.

My hope for you is that you are making progress on your spiritual journey. Many people stop short of receiving all that God has for them just as Israel stopped short when they failed to enter the Promised Land the first time. In their disobedience, they wandered in the wilderness turning a short trip into a 40 year NASCAR event - just going in circles. Our stopping short may be the result of fear, confusion or indifference. We may even cling to some sin and refuse to follow God's direction in certain matters. The end result is that we wander through life, failing to enjoy the blessings of God. So how do we move from where we are to where God wants us to be? The experience of the people of Israel gives us some clues.

2. You cannot find it "here." All of us seek equilibrium. We like comfort and convenience. We crave stability. We are risk averse. That's why, more often than not, God uses the discomfort and unpleasant circumstances in our lives to get us moving. Even in our pain God reveals our calling. Remember the three questions

Mother Teresa asked Don Stephens that inspired him to start Mercy Ships? 1. Why were you born? 2. Where is your pain? 3. What are you doing about it?

Through all of our life experiences, both good and bad, God's purpose emerges for us over time. Your GGP is determined before you are born. Jer. 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." We are born with a bent and we can live with the confident expectation that God will reveal His purpose over time. You have a God-given assignment. If that were not the case, then you would be done. As a friend of mine says, "If you're not dead, you're not done."

3. Getting "there" requires dedication and effort. The gospel is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Salvation is a gift. You cannot work for it. But our sanctification is the result of disciplined effort. There are certain habits and practices that lead to spiritual growth. We will identify some of those as we go through Joshua. And just like Israel, we will often take two steps forward and three steps back.

God knows our weakness and that our efforts are often unproductive but He still chooses to use us to accomplish His purposes. As C. S. Lewis once said, God "seems to do nothing of Himself which He can possibly delegate to His creatures. He commands us to do slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye." God has delegated to His people the task of embodying His presence upon the earth. We do it "slowly and blunderingly" but *how* we do it matters less to God than *that* we do it. Because of sin, we fall short of the glory of God but because of Jesus our feeble efforts can be redeemed.

As you work for God and with God He will be shaping you into the person He wants you to be. *God did not create people to get His work done but He created work to get His people done.*

4. No one gets "there" alone. Acts 2:46-47 says, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Your GGP is affirmed in community. God exists in community so it stands to reason that we cannot fully express God apart from community. Jesus joined a Life Group with 12 people in it. The early church met in Life Groups from house to

house. If that is the program that was used to establish the church it seems like a good way to build the church. But it will require a commitment to one another.

This past Tuesday, Kurt Pressler and I attended a meeting at Prestonwood Baptist Church. We arrived at around noon forgetting that Tuesday was the memorial service for Detective Jerry Walker who was killed in the line of duty in Little Elm. What we saw was something I will never forget. Lining the drive in front of the main entrance of the church were at least 100 police motorcycles waiting to escort the hearse to the cemetery. There were hundreds more police cars and officers from all over Texas and beyond. To say it was a moving tribute would be an understatement. For me, it was more of an inspiring reminder of the power of a common purpose. Police officers take care of their own.

I found myself thinking, "Dear God, why can't the church demonstrate this level of care and respect for one another? Where is the dedication and commitment to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ that is on display here today?"

1. Police officers share a common purpose - to protect and serve.
2. Police officers wear a common uniform so there is no mistaking who they are. Those who fail to uphold the standards of their profession disgrace the uniform.
3. Police officers live out a common duty to one another. They've got each other's back. Tuesday's service was a reminder that police officers put themselves in harm's way every day and they sometimes need back up. So do you and so do I.