

How big is your God? Is he strong or weak? Is he near or distant? Does he care about the details of your life, or is he indifferent to what's going on? Is he in control, or is he letting you fend for yourself? When I first arrived at Fellowship Dallas in 1999, I believed God was indeed the Savior but, beyond that, he just wanted me to be good. A.W. Tozer said "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question... we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man." **I believe many Christians today suffer from a small, limited idea of God, one that diminishes his impact on their lives and their impact in the world.**

You might struggle with that thought yourself. Over the last few months, as we've started talking about things like our God-given purpose, there might be a check in your spirit, something that keeps you from really believing it's knowable and attainable, or that God really cares and actually has the power to do anything about it anyway. That's why our view of God is so important. It impacts the way we live, the expectations we have, the prayers we pray, and the passion with which we pursue our calling.

We've been reading through the book of Joshua and how God gets his people *From Here to There*. And as he's moved them along, he's shown them more and more of himself: He brought Israel safely through 40 years in the desert and to the eastern shore of the Jordan River. He showed evidence of his work through the Canaanite prostitute named Rahab, witnessed by the two spies sent to Jericho. He demonstrated his power by parting the swollen Jordan River, allowing the nation of Israel to pass through on dry ground. He miraculously brought down the walls of Jericho, winning the battle before it had even begun. He defeated the nation of Ai after teaching his people a difficult lesson on the cost of disobedience. And then, as we saw last week, he held his people faithful to a covenant impulsively agreed to with Canaanite people known as Gibeonites, even though they had deceived Joshua.

That brings us to the fascinating, and encouraging, chapter 10. From his time in Egypt, to the forty years wandering in the desert, to witnessing God's most recent actions, Joshua has a *big* view of God. And this morning I want us to learn from Joshua's example of how to live and lead in the knowledge of the greatness of God.

**[JOSHUA 10:1-6] 10 As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them,<sup>2</sup> he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors.<sup>3</sup> So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying,<sup>4</sup> "Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon. For it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel."<sup>5</sup> Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it.<sup>6</sup> And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, "Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us."**

It looks as if the Gibeonite deception will continue to plague the Israelites. If the Israelite people murmured before because they were prevented from attacking the Gibeonites and had to live among them, now they are really going to murmur because they're being asked to put their lives at risk by providing militarily aid. At first, it appears chapter 10 will a continuation of chapter 9, with God teaching the lesson of impulsive and misguided decision making apart from his counsel.

The first thing we see Joshua do is **Live alertly...because God is big.**

God wants to get Israel "there". God wants Israel to claim their inheritance of the Promised Land. So, in his providence, he uses this alliance to present an opportunity to Joshua, one he must see and take in faith, and one that will accomplish God's purposes.

**[JOSHUA 10:7-11] <sup>7</sup> So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. <sup>8</sup> And the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you." <sup>9</sup> So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. <sup>10</sup> And the Lord threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. <sup>11</sup> And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword.**

It is unclear if Joshua considers this defense as part of the treaty with the Gibeonites. But Joshua has his eyes open, he's living alertly, and he clearly sees this opportunity given to him. So far, Joshua has gone one city-state at a time. The walled city of Jericho. The walled city of Ai. Each of these five kings ruled walled cities. At this pace, it's going to take another 40 years to conquer the land! But here, these five have left the protection of their cities and come together in an open plain next to Gibeon, giving Joshua the opportunity to defeat and destroy all of them at once, and he's all over it.

Living alertly allows Joshua to move decisively and expectantly. We see in v.7 that he immediately marches to Gibeon. We might wonder if this is yet another impulsive move, like the treaty with Gibeon. But we see in v.8 that **Joshua's bent for action is coupled with his seeking of the Lord.** And, as God has done so many times already in this story, he gives him the counsel to not be afraid and the promise that he would give them victory.

And that promise from God was needed. Think about what they were up against. They went to fight the confederated forces of five nations. The trek from Gilgal to Gibeon was 20-25 miles and ascended 4,000 feet. The Israelites were outnumbered and out of breath. Victory was not realized because of Joshua's willingness to go, and Israel's effort in the battle. It was the Lord, using their willingness and effort, who achieved victory. The text tells us it was God who threw them into a great panic. It was the Lord who threw down great hailstones. And, in case the point wasn't made thoroughly enough, the end of v.11 tells us the hailstones took more lives than the

swords of the Israelites. Translation? Israel showed up and fought in the battle, but God achieved the victory.

I have a friend who had been involved in the leadership of a parachurch ministry for several years. They asked him if he was on board for another year, probably expecting a quick yes. But something was going on inside him. God was stirring and my friend felt like there might be something different God wanted him to do. So, he asked for thirty days to consider it and, while doing so, his church approached him about becoming an elder there. This is a guy attuned to God, sensitive to his leading and eager to obediently follow, and on the lookout for the opportunities God may place before him that put him in a position for God to work through him, and it's the same thing here with Joshua.

Does your view of God allow you to believe that he is on the move, that he is using circumstances, both good and bad, to bring about opportunities to get you "there"? **The God who invites us to be a part of his work, works for us and through us as we play our part.** A divine opportunity is given in His providence, pursued through our faith, and accomplished by his grace and power.

Now, the story continues and Joshua shows us how to live in the midst of these divine opportunities. We are to **Pray boldly...because God is big.**

Over spring break, I took my three boys to Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma where they have these giant rock and boulder formations that get progressively higher and higher. It's an incredible place if you like to climb. But there's a sign at the front of the climbing area that says, "This park closes at dusk." They do that because, while the elevation never gets very high, there are some rather treacherous areas where you are going to fall a long way if you miss a step. Darkness is not your friend.

For Israel, the soldiers of these five kingdoms are now fleeing from the battlefield. While there has been a decisive victory in defending Gibeon, the battle is not yet complete. And you know where they're headed? Back to their fortified cities. This incredible opportunity to have these five armies all in the same place, outside of their walls, this incredible opportunity to advance the mission God has given to Israel, appears at risk because it's going to take more time, and they are quite literally running out of daylight. Darkness is not their friend. So, let's see what Joshua does:

**[JOSHUA 10:12-14]<sup>12</sup> At that time Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon."<sup>13</sup> And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.<sup>14</sup> There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord heeded the voice of a man, for the Lord fought for Israel.**

Well that's...interesting. Now listen, we're not exactly sure what happened on that day. It could be that God stopped or slowed the earth's rotation, or he supernaturally provided extended

daylight. We don't dare limit God because this is the God who parted the Jordan River, brought down the walls of Jericho, and decimated an army with large hailstones. If he wants to stop the earth's rotation while also preventing the astronomical consequences of that, he can do it. What we do know is that something miraculous happened, the text telling us "there has been no day like it before or since."

God miraculously provides for his people to continue in their mission while also demoralizing their enemies. The sun and moon were Amorite gods and at some point in the day, they must have noticed their god wasn't making his way across the sky as he usually does. I was on a Alaskan cruise many summers ago and, at the northernmost point of our trip, the sun never really set that night, and it was completely disorienting. You wake up at three in the morning, it feels like it's nine in the morning, and you're terrified you missed breakfast. These Amorites are terrified because, not only are they being routed by the Israelites on the battlefield, their gods are being routed by Israel's God in the sky.

I'll be the first to admit I never would have even considered asking God to make the sun stand still. But this is a faithful man, who knows God's will and purpose for himself and his people. He has been alert to, and acted on, the opportunity presented to him that day, and he prays boldly, a prayer of significant magnitude, because he knows the greatness, the bigness, of God and he knows the Lord will accomplish what he's calling Israel to do and be. And by his grace, through the faithful prayer of Joshua, God answers and provides extended daylight for Israel to finish carrying out its mission.

This passage convicted me. What is the biggest, boldest prayer I've ever prayed? How does my prayer life reflect what I think about God, how I think he might move in my life?

**God will inevitably appear to disappoint the man who is attempting to use Him as a convenience, a prop, or a comfort, for his own plans. God has never been known to disappoint the man who is sincerely wanting to co-operate with His own purposes. –JB Phillips, *Your God is Too Small***

Look, we might read this passage and be tempted to consider God as a holy order-taker, that we can control God to give us what we want. And maybe some of us struggle with that. But that's not what's going on here. Jesus didn't say "whatever you ask of the Father...He will give to you." He said "whatever you ask the Father, *in my name*, He will give to you." Joshua is praying a bold and faithful prayer that is aligned with the will of God. And God answers it.

Our church is in a time of bold prayer. As God has given us the mission of calling each other to live out our God-given purpose in Christ every day, he has also given us a vision that, by the year 2026, we would become a training and launching ground for 10,000 people to discover and live out their unique, God-given, Kingdom purpose in Christ. That's a big number that's going to require a big God to accomplish it. But we pray boldly for God to bring that about, and we do so with confidence because we believe it is his calling for our church.

What about you? What's the biggest prayer you've ever prayed? I'm not as much concerned about us trying to name it and claim it as I am that we don't pray big enough. That we limit ourselves by praying for things outside of God's will, or we limit God and what he can do through us because we're just not sure he's willing or capable. What a wonderful opportunity for you to take an assessment of your prayer life because our prayer life directly reveals our view of God and our view of ourselves. Do that work because here's where I want you to get: **You pray boldly when you believe a mighty God wants to do an extraordinary work through an ordinary you.**

So Joshua prays boldly, God answers, and Israel destroys their enemies. How would Joshua and Israel respond after this stunning and decisive victory? The last thing Joshua models for us is to **Pursue obediently...because God is big.**

The text tells us that, as the armies fled the battle at Gibeon, the five kings made their way to Makkedah and hid in a cave there. They were discovered, and Joshua ordered them to be sealed in while they pursued and struck down the remaining soldiers. It was now time for holy justice, and a lesson to the people of Israel.

**[JOSHUA 10:24-27] <sup>24</sup> And when they brought those kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near; put your feet on the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. <sup>25</sup> And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight." <sup>26</sup> And afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees. And they hung on the trees until evening. <sup>27</sup> But at the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and they set large stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to this very day.**

As if the defeat in battle and the loss of their entire armies wasn't enough, these kings are now paraded out and humiliated before the Israelites, perhaps to fulfill the prophetic words of Moses found in Deuteronomy 33, where he says, **"Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their back."** God again tells the people to be strong and courageous, and that he would give them victory. Then Joshua executes the kings and hangs them on trees.

While this scene was likely intended to encourage and strengthen Israel, it also served as a gracious cautionary tale to remind them what happens to those who oppose the one true God, because it won't be very long until Israel will be tempted to imitate these Canaanite practices. As we've seen through this entire book, obedience is of paramount importance, because **fulfilling our purpose from God is inseparably linked to fulfilling the commands of God.** And so, just as Joshua did with the king of Ai, here again he takes down these men, following the command in Deuteronomy 21, that a body shall not remain all night in a tree.

And as the sun sets on this very long day, so begins the swift conquest over all of Southern Canaan. The rest of the chapter tells us of Israel continuing their faithful march forward,

decimating city after city, the Lord God giving them victory over their enemies. And by the end of chapter 10, the big God of Israel has secured for his people half of the Promised Land.

So what do we do with this? Over the last few weeks, not only have we looked at how God gets the nation of Israel *From Here to There*, but how he can do that for each of us individually. If you are in a Life Group, you've been working through multiple exercises to move you in that direction. We began by looking back at our own story, how God has moved in our lives, and what our story means. Over the last couple weeks, we focused more on the present, on how God is stirring in our hearts to give us passions and burdens. And all that work culminates in this week's activity, where you're going to have the first opportunity to define your calling, your God-given purpose, in two words. For some of you, it will be pretty clear what those two words are. For others, this assignment is going to be a great challenge.

But for all of us, to write down two words makes an assumption that our God has created us on purpose, for a purpose. That he has a unique calling on all of our lives. That may be tough for you to believe right now because you're not sure that's who God is. There was a time when, if I had to boil it down to two words, I would have said "surviving life". Success was finishing my day with food in my kids' stomachs and no one mad at me. But I knew there had to be more, and there was.

Perhaps the boldest prayer we can all pray this morning is: Lord, reveal to me why you made me, give me opportunities to pursue it and, by your grace and power, allow me to accomplish it. And if the way I'm living or believing is an obstacle to it, reveal it to me and help me overcome it.

And we can pray that bold prayer with confidence because of what we read at the end of the chapter. Israel accomplished all these things, because God fought for them. And if God who fought for Israel fights for me and fights for you. And whatever God fights for will come to pass. Why? Because God is big.