BREAKING THE CYCLE OF UNPREPAREDNESS: WHEN PREPARATION BECOMES ACTION

Primary Scripture

Joshua 3:14–17 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Preparation gets us ready, but obedience moves us forward.

Introduction

There is a difference between being prepared to change and actually changing. We can recognize an unhealthy pattern, understand what Scripture teaches, and sincerely desire something different while continuing to make the same choices.

This message brings us to the moment when preparation must become action. Israel's earlier generation had allowed fear to overwhelm faith. Now, a new generation stood before the Jordan with an opportunity to respond differently.

The question reaches into our own lives: **Will we allow our circumstances to determine our obedience, or will we allow God's Word to direct our response?**

Key Teaching Points

1. Preparation must produce participation.

"What good is preparation, if it never produces participation?"

Preparation matters, but it is not a substitute for obedience. We can spend so much time getting ready that we never begin doing what we already know we should do.

We may prepare to forgive someone without taking a healthy step toward addressing the hurt. We may intend to become more disciplined without changing our daily routines. We may desire spiritual growth without developing a consistent prayer life.

The issue is not simply whether we have learned something. The issue is whether what we have learned is influencing how we live.

Our convictions must become commitments. Our intentions must become actions.

Consider the area where you keep saying, "I know I need to do that." What would it look like to move from acknowledging the need to responding to it?

2. Difficult circumstances do not cancel God's direction.

The Jordan was overflowing its banks when the priests approached it. Their feet touched the water before the passage describes the upstream waters stopping. They responded to God's instruction while the obstacle was still in front of them. Bible.com

"God's direction does not always come when circumstances are convenient."

Sometimes we assume that obedience will become easier once the situation changes. We wait for the conversation to feel comfortable, for discipline to become effortless, or for fear to disappear.

But the message challenges us to consider whether we are allowing difficult circumstances to overrule clear biblical instruction.

The priests' obedience brought them toward the river, not away from it. In the same way, spiritual growth may require us to face something we would rather avoid.

The presence of an obstacle does not remove our responsibility to respond to God's Word.

3. God's Word, not personality, must be the authority.

Before the crossing, Joshua called the people to hear the words of the Lord. Romans 10:17 likewise connects faith with hearing God's Word. Bible.com

The sermon emphasizes that effective spiritual leadership requires solid biblical training under people who know God's Word. Personality, charisma, and popularity cannot replace a foundation in Scripture.

This matters for those who lead and for those who follow. We must learn to ask more than, "Did that sound inspiring?" We must also ask, "Is that faithful to what God has said?"

Our next step should not be driven merely by someone's confidence or our own excitement. It should be grounded in biblical truth.

Faithful leadership points people toward God's Word, and faithful obedience responds to that Word.

4. Confront what you have been avoiding.

"Your next season may require you to confront what you have been avoiding."

Avoidance can keep unhealthy cycles going. We may avoid responsibility, accountability, difficult conversations, destructive habits, or the emotional wounds influencing our responses.

The sermon illustrates this through the cycle of unforgiveness:

Hurt → Offense → Withdrawal → Growing resentment → Bitterness carried into other relationships

The original situation may be over, but the pattern continues. A past offense can begin shaping how we respond to people who were not responsible for the original hurt.

"What we refuse to confront may continue to control our responses."

Breaking the cycle requires more than pretending the hurt did not happen. The message calls us to address it through **prayer, truth, forgiveness, and appropriate boundaries**.

Confronting an issue does not mean abandoning wisdom or ignoring boundaries. It means becoming willing to deal honestly with what has been affecting our lives.

5. The river represents a moment of decision.

The Jordan was a literal river in Israel's history, not merely a symbol of personal problems. The sermon draws an application from their response: they had to decide whether they would trust God's instruction in the presence of a real obstacle.

We also face moments when faith must influence action.

Will we continue doing what is familiar, or will we practice what God is teaching us? Will we keep defending an unhealthy response, or will we accept

responsibility for changing it? Will we continue preparing to obey, or will we begin?

“The cycle loses its power when you stop avoiding the change God is calling you to make.”

The goal is not activity for its own sake. It is obedient action in response to God’s Word.

6. Let endurance do its work.

Taking the first step does not mean the process is finished. Spiritual maturity develops as we continue practicing faithfulness through difficulty.

James 1:3–4 teaches that the testing of faith produces patience, or endurance, and that endurance contributes to maturity and completeness. First Peter 1:7 describes genuine faith as more precious than gold, even as it is tested. Bible Gateway

The sermon asks a personal question: **How do you respond when your faith is tested and your buttons are pushed?**

Those moments reveal where growth is still needed. Instead of immediately returning to an old response, we can practice the obedience, patience, and discipline God is developing in us.

“The challenge you are facing now may become the place where God develops the strength you will need in your next season.”

Supporting Scriptures

Joshua 3:9
Joshua directs the people to hear God’s words, reinforcing the message’s emphasis on Scripture as the foundation for leadership and obedience. Bible.com

Romans 10:17
Faith comes through hearing God’s Word. Our confidence must be rooted in what God has said, not merely in persuasive personalities or favorable circumstances. Bible Gateway

James 1:3–4
The testing of faith produces endurance, and endurance has a continuing role in developing spiritual maturity. Bible Gateway

1 Peter 1:7
Peter emphasizes the preciousness of genuine faith and its testing, supporting the sermon's call to remain faithful through difficulty. Bible Gateway

Reflection / Discussion Questions

1. Where have you been preparing for change without taking a practical step? What has kept your intention from becoming action?
2. How does the priests' response at the overflowing Jordan challenge your expectations about when obedience should feel comfortable?
3. How can you distinguish between guidance grounded in Scripture and guidance that mainly appeals to your emotions or preferences?
4. What responsibility, conversation, habit, or unresolved hurt have you been avoiding? How has that avoidance affected your responses?
5. What would addressing an offense through prayer, truth, forgiveness, and appropriate boundaries look like in your situation?
6. Where is your faith being tested right now? What would a patient, faithful response look like instead of your familiar reaction?

Practical Application

Name the intention.
Choose one area where you already understand the need for change. Complete this sentence:

"I have been preparing to _____, but I have not yet _____."

Choose one concrete act of obedience.
Make the action specific enough to put into practice this week. For example, replace "I need to pray more" with a set time for daily prayer. Replace "I need more discipline" with one change to your routine. When dealing with an offense, identify a healthy next step involving honest prayer, an appropriate conversation, forgiveness, or a necessary boundary.

Practice faithfulness when resistance appears.
Do not measure the entire process by whether the first step feels easy. Notice when you are tempted to return to avoidance or an old response. Ask a trusted, spiritually mature person to help you remain accountable, and review your progress at the end of the week.

This week's challenge: Turn one intention into a specific act of obedience.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for preparing us and speaking to us through Your Word. Forgive us for the times we have known what to do but continued to delay. Help us recognize where fear, avoidance, and familiar habits are shaping our decisions. Give us courage to confront what needs attention, humility to receive instruction, and wisdom to practice forgiveness with appropriate boundaries. Strengthen our faith when obedience is difficult. Develop endurance in us, and help us remain faithful as we grow. Let what we know become visible in what we do. In Jesus' name, amen.