BREAKING THE CYCLE OF UNPREPAREDNESS

(GETTING YOU READY FOR WHAT GOD IS PREPARING YOU TO DO)

Primary Scripture

Joshua 3:1–5

Big Idea

Today's preparation positions us for tomorrow's possibilities. God may be preparing the opportunity, but He is also preparing us to be able to walk into it.

Introduction

Israel had wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Now they were standing at the Jordan River with the Promised Land on the other side.

They could see where they were going, but they still had to cross.

Joshua's instruction before the crossing is important:

"Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

God was going to perform the miracle, but Israel still had a responsibility to prepare.

That raises an important question for us: What if God answered today what we have been asking Him for?

A new season requires more than a new opportunity. It requires a prepared person.

Sometimes we are asking God to change our season while God is working to change us.

Key Teaching Points

1. We Must Break the Cycle of Living Unprepared

Joshua did not tell Israel to prepare the Jordan.

He told them to prepare themselves.

They could not control the river. They could not control what waited on the other side. But they could allow God to prepare what was happening inside of them.

Preparation begins internally.

We often spend enormous amounts of energy trying to change circumstances around us while God is trying to change something within us.

There is always a danger in being gifted but unprepared.

Saul demonstrates what can happen when position and opportunity arrive without the spiritual maturity and obedience necessary to sustain them. His story reminds us that talent may open a door that character is not prepared to sustain.

Opportunity can arrive before discipline has developed.

Blessings can increase faster than wisdom.

David's journey provides a different picture. There was an anointing season, but there was also a preparation season. He did not immediately occupy the throne associated with his calling.

What looked like delay was actually development.

Sometimes the season we want God to end is the very season God is using to develop what the next one will require.

Don't despise this season that is developing what the next season will demand.

God may be saying:

"I'm going to bring you out, but first I'm putting something in you."

2. Preparation Requires Consecration

Joshua told the people:

"Sanctify yourselves."

Sanctification means being set apart for God's purposes.

Before Israel crossed into something new, God wanted them spiritually prepared for what was ahead.

That means preparation sometimes requires letting go.

If God is taking us somewhere new, an important question becomes:

“What must I leave behind?”

Hebrews 12:1 tells believers to lay aside both weight and sin.

That distinction matters.

Everything holding us back may not necessarily be sinful. Some things are simply too heavy for where God is taking us.

A relationship, habit, attitude, routine, expectation, distraction, or way of thinking may not appear sinful on the surface, but if it continually prevents us from becoming who God is calling us to become, we must consider whether we should continue carrying it.

If it keeps me from becoming who God is calling me to become, I cannot keep carrying it.

We cannot continually ask God for something new while insisting on holding onto everything old.

3. Stop Expecting a New Season With Old Habits

Breaking the cycle becomes practical when we examine our repeated patterns.

Romans 12:2 teaches that transformation comes through the renewing of the mind.

Transformation involves changing patterns of thought.

Consider some cycles that can repeat in our lives:

● We become frustrated, so we quit.

● We become offended, so we withdraw.

● We become afraid, so we procrastinate.

● We experience disappointment, so we stop trusting.

● We make progress, then return to familiar habits.

● We receive an opportunity, but self-doubt talks us out of pursuing it.

At some point we must recognize:

The problem isn't always the season. Sometimes it's the cycle.

Changing environments without changing patterns can eventually reproduce the same results.

Imagine moving into a beautiful new house with new floors, new walls, more room, and new appliances. But instead of cleaning out the old house, you pack up the garbage and move it into the new one.

Eventually the new house starts looking like the old house.

Why?

The environment changed, but what you carried didn't.

Sometimes God gives us a new beginning, but we carry the same attitudes, fears, offenses, thinking, and habits into it.

A new environment cannot permanently overcome an unchanged pattern.

So the question is not only:

"Where is God taking me?"

We must also ask:

"What baggage am I carrying with me?"

Supporting Scriptures

Isaiah 43:18–19

God declares that He is doing a new thing and making a way through difficult territory. The new thing may require traveling through unfamiliar territory, but God goes ahead of His people and prepares the way.

1 Samuel 15:16–23

Saul's story demonstrates the importance of obedience and character. Position alone cannot compensate for an unwillingness to obey God.

Hebrews 12:1

We are instructed to lay aside both sin and unnecessary weight so that we can run the race God has placed before us.

Romans 12:2

Lasting transformation requires renewed thinking. New circumstances without renewed thought patterns can reproduce old results.

Reflection / Discussion Questions

1. If God answered one of your major prayers today, in what areas would you already be prepared, and where might you still need development?

2. Why do you think we sometimes focus more on changing our circumstances than allowing God to change us?

3. What does Joshua's command to "sanctify yourselves" teach us about our responsibility when God is preparing to do something new?

4. Can you identify something in your life that may not necessarily be sinful but has become a weight that makes it harder to move forward?

5. Which repeated pattern do you recognize most easily in yourself: quitting when frustrated, withdrawing when offended, procrastinating when afraid, losing trust after disappointment, returning to familiar habits, or allowing self-doubt to stop you?

6. Where have you interpreted a season of development as a season of unnecessary delay?

7. What might God be developing in you now that your next season will require?

8. What would need to change in your habits, thinking, discipline, or spiritual life if the opportunity you have been praying for arrived tomorrow?

9. How can you distinguish between something God is asking you to leave behind and something you are simply uncomfortable carrying?

10. Instead of only asking, "Where is God taking me?", what changes when you also ask, "What baggage am I carrying with me?"

Practical Application

Identify Your Jordan

Write down one area where you believe God is calling you forward. Instead of concentrating first on what must change externally, ask:

“What needs to change in me?”

Identify the Weight

Prayerfully examine what you are carrying. Identify one habit, attitude, distraction, relationship dynamic, fear, or thought pattern that may be making the journey unnecessarily difficult.

Identify the Cycle

Notice what consistently triggers an unhealthy response.

Complete this sentence:

“Whenever _____ happens, I usually _____.”

Recognizing the pattern helps expose the cycle.

Replace the Pattern

Determine what a renewed response would look like.

Instead of:

Frustration → quitting

Begin practicing:

Frustration → prayer, evaluation, adjustment, perseverance

Instead of:

Fear → procrastination

Practice:

Fear → trust, preparation, action

Instead of:

Offense → withdrawal

Practice:

Offense → prayer, healthy conversation, forgiveness

Prepare Today

Do one thing now that prepares you for what you have been praying for.

Study.

Develop the skill.

Correct the habit.

Make the call.

Create the discipline.

Have the conversation.

Strengthen your prayer life.

Remove the weight.

Today's preparation positions you for tomorrow's possibilities.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that You are not only preparing places for us, but You are preparing us for the places You have called us to go.

Show us anything within us that is not ready for what You are preparing. Search our hearts, renew our minds, strengthen our character, and teach us to walk in obedience.

Give us the courage to lay aside every sin and every weight that would hinder us. Help us recognize the cycles, habits, fears, attitudes, and thought patterns that we cannot carry into the next season.

Keep us from despising seasons of development. Help us understand that what feels like delay may be Your way of preparing us for what our future will demand.

Sanctify us and set us apart for Your purposes.

When the opportunity comes, let us not simply be gifted enough to enter it. Make us mature enough, disciplined enough, obedient enough, and prepared enough to steward it well.

Prepare us today for the wonders You will do tomorrow.

In Jesus' name, Amen.