

Walking in Prayer: Old Testament

Lesson 4: Prayers of Joshua

Vocabulary:

motive	to be filled with	mess	in a sense
to turn out	face down	to waste energy	on the contrary
to fail (n. failure)	reverence	to wonder	to violate
to face challenges	upon (+ verb ending in -ing)	to bother (adj. bothered)	to steal (adj. stolen)
tremendous	distress	to comfort	justice (adj. just)
to defeat (n. defeat)	humility	disaster	to show favoritism
to wander	sovereign	to be centered around	to rid
to cross	content	to volunteer	to restore
to march	to wipe out	ministry	deliberately
courageous	to regret	role	to contribute to

Discussion:

In Lesson 3, we learned from Jacob how to wrestle with God to receive our blessings, our identity, our direction, and our ability to trust him completely. Jacob also shows us how to wrestle with our relationships to achieve unity and peace.

Share one way that your life or relationship with God was impacted from the last lesson. In what ways do you still want to grow?

In this study, we will look at the life and prayers of Joshua to examine our **motives** and heart toward sin during our prayers to God.

The Prayers of Joshua (Joshua 1-10)

Have you ever felt like life is against you and nothing is **turning out** the way you expect? You try to move forward, but it seems as though a wall is stopping you? Maybe you've even prayed, heard the Lord, and moved forward by faith, only to **fail**. Joshua can relate! Joshua was the man God chose after Moses's death to lead the Jewish people into the promised land of Canaan. He faces a wall shortly after he is chosen as the leader over God's people.

Share about a time in the past where you planned well, maybe even prayed, and pursued a dream that **faced tremendous challenges** or even **defeat**. Perhaps you even heard God lead you in a certain direction that didn't turn out the way you had planned. What happened? How did you feel? What doubts or questions did you experience?

Is there a dream or plan you want to achieve in your life that you are praying about right now? Describe.

The Hebrew people had been **wandering** in the desert for forty years. They had prayed, persevered, and were now ready to **cross** the Jordan River and defeat the land the Lord had promised them: Canaan,

now modern day Israel. Joshua clearly hears the Lord's voice telling him to **march** boldly into the land: "Be strong and **courageous** because you will lead these people to inherit the land" (1:6). The Lord promises them success, as long as Joshua and the Hebrew people obey the Lord's commands. Joshua **is filled with** faith and courage, ready to fight and win this new land for God's people. God even confirms Joshua as the new leader when God miraculously parts the Jordan River at flood stage to let Joshua and his men cross over into the promised land. Everything is going just as planned!

Soon after, an angel appears to Joshua to give him specific direction on how to defeat the city of Jericho. When Joshua sees the angel, he falls **facedown** to the ground in reverence. **Upon** hearing the instructions, Joshua obeys the Lord, doing everything that the angel commands, and completely defeats the city of Jericho.

How would you describe Joshua's heart toward God?

Consider your past plans that you shared. Do you remember spending time asking the Lord for direction? If yes, what direction did God give you? If no, explain.

Were any verses in the Bible guiding you during this time? If yes, what were they? If no, what verses or teachings of God might have guided you?

Looking back, how did you follow or not follow God's direction? What could you have done differently?

Consider your current plans. How can you learn from your past? What would it look like to imitate Joshua?

With great confidence, Joshua then goes to defeat the city of Ai, but this time, the Hebrews are defeated, and many Hebrew men die in battle. Joshua tears his clothes in **distress** and **humility** before God and falls again to the ground facedown. He stays in that place for an entire day seeking the voice of the Lord (7:6). Then he cries out to God, "Ah, **Sovereign** Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been **content** to stay on the other side of the Jordan!... The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this, and they will surround us and **wipe out** our name from the earth. What then will we do for your own great name?" (7:9).

How does Joshua respond to his defeat? What does he do? What does he say? What are his concerns?

Think about the situation when you faced defeat. How did you respond? How can you relate or not relate to what Joshua felt?

We see in Joshua's prayer that he **regrets** even *trying* to live out his dream for God. He can't stand defeat and blames God for leading him into this **mess**! He feels like he **wasted** his **energy** and **wonders** why he **bothered** sacrificing his **comfort** for such a **disaster**. He's embarrassed by what others will think

about the Hebrew people and how others will act toward them. Yet, as Joshua continues to pray, we hear his deepest pain and desire: to do something great for God. His who identity is **centered around** serving the Lord and making God's name great. His greatest fear is losing this opportunity to serve the Lord. This was the purpose of his life, and if he didn't see victory, then where would he find meaning in his life?

Think about your past and present dreams. Can you relate to any of Joshua's feelings? Explain.

Are the purposes of your dreams to make your name great, God's name great, or a little of both? You may have had other motives but explore whether or not God was the center of those dreams. Explain.

In the past when your dream failed, who were you concerned about the most? Yourself, God, or both? Explain.

If we are honest with ourselves, many of us are more concerned about how situations in our lives affect us, our name, our identity, and our life more than how they affect God. Even when we are doing things *for* God – maybe **volunteering**, serving in a **ministry**, or serving in a special **role** – our own name, image, and worth can become the reason why we are trying to succeed. The good news is that God can change us! He can give us dreams for our lives that are for *his* glory. When we are willing to stop living for ourselves and commit to living for his great name, not ours, God will help us to grow and succeed so that more people can experience his love. **In a sense**, our greatest honor is bringing glory to God!

Even though Joshua is struggling with the results of his dream, God does not blame Joshua for the **failure**. He doesn't even get angry with Joshua for his prayer! The Lord knows that Joshua longs to make the name of God great throughout the world, and God wants to bless this dream. **On the contrary**, the Lord says this to Joshua: "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel* has sinned; they have **violated** my covenant [or agreement], which I commanded them to keep...That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies" (7:11-12). God then tells Joshua to find out who has sinned against the Lord and has caused the failure in battle. Joshua obeys but only to find out that his own relative Achan is guilty. Achan had **stolen** some silver and gold that was supposed to be placed in the temple of God and given as a sacrifice. The **just** punishment at the time of Mosaic Law was to kill a person for this sin. Joshua does not **show favoritism** but obeys the Law of Moses. Achan is killed and buried, and all of Israel is reconciled to their God.

*Israel is a reference to the Jewish people.

Joshua's plans fail because of the sin of someone else. What are examples of sin? (See the *Victory over Sin* study for ideas.)

What do we learn about God's heart toward sin in this story? What is Joshua's heart about sin?

What is Joshua willing to do to destroy sin among the Israelites? How are Joshua's actions a symbol of what God will do with sin later in the New Testament?

In this part of Joshua's story, we see the role of justice in the Law of Moses, and that God's heart has and always will be to **rid** his people of sin. Sin separates us from our Father in heaven who loves us as his

children. Sin not only destroys our physical lives, but our relationships with God and with others. For this reason, God's heart about sin has never changed. Yet instead of sending us to the grave as punishment, he sent his one and only Son Jesus to pay the price for our sins on the cross, **restore** our relationship with our Father in heaven, and give us the power to begin overcoming sin.

Even though God knows we will never be perfect, he made this sacrifice for us so that we would love our Lord and Savior and not continue sinning **deliberately**.¹ In Joshua's story, God also restores his love and support for the Israelites in battles so they can conquer the land of Canaan, the land he had been promising them. When the sin is removed, Joshua sees the blessings of his God. Joshua's faith in God becomes so strong that he boldly prays for God to stop the sun and moon until the Israelites have conquered their enemies, and the Lord generously answers Joshua's prayer. In fact, the book of Joshua records that "there has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man" (10:14).

In your past situation, do you see any sins in your life that **contributed to** your failure? Did you allow someone else to sin in a way that contributed to the failure? If yes, explain.

Is there any sin in your life today that you feel will keep God from answering your prayers? Write them down and share what you are comfortable sharing. Spend some time praying for one another to overcome these sins.

When Joshua had revealed and destroyed the sin in his camp, Joshua was filled with faith and prayed a bold prayer that God answered. Is there a bold prayer that you want God to answer as you pursue your plans? If yes, share your prayer request.

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Take some time to write about your plans for your life and what it would mean to make God's name great in these plans. Confess to God and a close friend any ways that you've tried make your name great instead of God's.
2. Confess to God and a close friend how your sins caused a past failure, or if you allowed the sin of another person to cause the plans to fail. Explore ways that you can take responsibility for what happened. What can you learn from these experiences to help you with future plans?
3. Consider the last question in this study. Take time to confess to God and a close friend any sins that you see in your life today so that no sin will get in the way of God's plans for you.
4. If you have confessed and turned away from your sin, then write a bold prayer about your plans for God. Spend time with God praying over your request!

¹ Hebrews 10:23.