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Getting Your Feet Wet
Joshua 3
February 21, 2016, Jeff Germo
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Joshua 3 (NLT) [students to read]

¹ Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing. ² Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, ³ giving these instructions to the people: “When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, move out from your positions and follow them.

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⁴ Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about a half mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don’t come any closer.” ⁵ Then Joshua told the people, “Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you.”

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⁶ In the morning Joshua said to the priests, “Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river.” And so they started out and went ahead of the people. ⁷The Lord told Joshua, “Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses.

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⁸ Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: ‘When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there.’ ” ⁹ So Joshua told the Israelites, “Come and listen to what the Lord your God says. ¹⁰Today you will know that the living God is among you. He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites ahead of you.

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¹¹ Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River! ¹² Now choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall.”

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¹⁴ So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river’s edge,

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¹⁶ the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho. ¹⁷ Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

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I think if I were to ask you for some words that described Joshua you would choose words like, “courageous”, “military leader”, “strategist”, “mighty warrior”, “great leader”, “Man of God.” I don’t think there is any doubt that Joshua was all of these things and more.

But, when you read through the book of Joshua one thing becomes very clear; it was none of those qualities in and of themselves that brought victory for Joshua and the people he was leading. The major theme in the book of Joshua is that it will be Yahweh who is victorious, and who will receive the glory, and not the genius of a charismatic leader.

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God is the hero in every story.

Sometimes preachers use stories from the Bible and exhort us to be a leader like Moses, or Joshua. I don’t know about you, but when I hear those kinds of sermons it doesn’t always inspire me to great heights. Sometimes it demoralizes me because I know I am not a Moses or a Joshua. And besides that, when we do that it gives the impression that Moses and Joshua were the main characters in the stories. They weren’t. God was. **God does not call us because we are competent.**

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As a matter of fact **sometimes our competence can get in the way of what God wants to do through us.** If we think our great skills are enough to turn the hearts of people toward Jesus, we will be tempted to move forward without God. This is why he, sometimes, needs to whittle us down to size so there is no mistake about who is in charge and who will get the glory.

The biblical illustrations of this fact are many: Gideon; Moses; Joseph; David and all the other kings; Peter, Paul; and numerous others are examples of God taking a leader, or even a group of people, who were quite competent, and making sure there is no doubt the great things that are going to happen through these people could not happen without God.

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God’s work cannot be done through the ingenuity of man alone.

When, as a church, we do things like having numerical growth as our goal or focus, even if we start out with good motives, we will tend toward thinking that numbers are *the* sign of God’s blessing. If the offerings are up, or the number of new people coming through our doors is up, or the number of people getting baptized increases, we think we have God’s blessing. God may, in fact, be blessing. All of those things are good, but I know lots of organizations that are growing by leaps and bounds and who have millions of dollars flowing through their coffers, but do not have the blessing of God. ISIS comes to mind.

Even as individuals, if we use numbers, or financial success, as *the* indicator of God’s blessing we will fall into the trap of using whatever means necessary to make sure we have numbers, and we will compromise God’s best to get those numbers.

If we use numbers and financial success as metrics to assess God’s blessing on our lives, we would have to call Jesus and Paul colossal failures. They didn’t have money. Look at how many people turned from Jesus. Look at how they were persecuted.

Sometimes, as we see with the story of Gideon, God will reduce our numbers to show without a doubt that he, not some great human leader, is the protagonist in the story.

The main theme in the book of Joshua is the power of God working through a people who are courageously, in the face of fear, committed to doing things God's way, and which, at times, did not make sense.

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The protagonist in this story is not Joshua, but God.

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Joshua 3 (NLT)

¹ Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia Grove and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing.

Joshua immediately set out. He didn't form a committee and put together and a discussion group to form a viability report in triplicate. God said go and do it, and he immediately moved into action.

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² Three days later the Israelite officers went through the camp, ³ giving these instructions to the people: "When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, move out from your positions and follow them.

They were to set their eyes on the ark, which represented God's Presence, not on those carrying the ark, not on programs or strategy, not on weapons, but on the ark – God's presence, the God who created the heavens and the earth. We move forward today, in the twenty-first century in Campbell River ***"fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,"*** the writer of Hebrews says.

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⁴ Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about a half mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don't come any closer."

They were to keep this distance, about 900 meters, (nearly one kilometer) between them and the ark, for a number of reasons. **Firstly**, so everyone could see it. If they crowded around too closely the ark would be lost among the crowd. By keeping their distance around it, it would be in plain view.

Secondly, by setting the ark apart in such a way, it highlighted the fact that they were following God, not people, not a program, not some great strategy, but the presence of God.

Thirdly, and likely the most important reason, they kept that distance because of the sacredness of the ark. It was not just a piece of furniture. It was holy.

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⁵ Then Joshua told the people, "Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you."

Notice here that Joshua didn't say "get your weapons ready, or your programs, or your strategies." Not that it's wrong to strategize or have programs. It's not. We need them. But, there is something far more important.

He said, "Purify yourselves. Get yourselves ready. Check your heart. Make sure your whole being, everything about you is set apart for what God wants to do." In a ceremonial sense they were to go through the ritual of washing themselves, and their clothes, but in a more real sense they were to get their hearts ready.

They were to take their eyes off themselves, and their problems, or the obstacles in front of them. They were to take their eyes off their comfort or lack thereof and focus on God and his greatness, and holiness and make sure their hearts were soft and surrendered to God's will, because what was going to happen in the next few days would test them in every way.

Likewise, we need to do the same regularly. Is my heart right with God? Do I have unconfessed sin I am harbouring? Is there bitterness, resentment, jealousy, anger, or some of the more subtle sins that aren't so easy for others to detect.

We can sometimes hide behind a facade of goodness by doing the right things, when our hearts are black with a critical or judgmental spirit, or some other subtle sin. God does not ask for perfect people to use. As a matter of fact, he only uses broken people. But he does ask for clean vessels. So, the Israelites go through a cleansing.

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⁶ In the morning Joshua said to the priests, "Lift up the Ark of the Covenant and lead the people across the river." And so they started out and went ahead of the people.

So, again, the ark is taken in front of the people so they would know it is God they are following.

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⁷The Lord told Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses."

This was so important. If these people were going to follow Joshua they would have to know God was ahead of him. They would have to know he wasn't leading them into a suicide mission.

How many stories have we heard about people who have said they were called by God to lead a people and ended up leading them into destruction? Jim Jones, David Koresh, Joseph Smith are a few names that come to mind. We've talked about this before.

In the late 70s Jim Jones, the founder and charismatic leader of **The People's Temple** believed himself to be, and led his followers to believe, he was the reincarnation of both Jesus and Lenin. The end of that tragic story is that he led nearly a thousand of his followers to their deaths by getting them to drink a concoction of Kool-aid.

And of course there is the cult led by David Koresh who led 90 of his followers to commit suicide in Waco Texas. In the 90s there was the **Order of the Solar Temple** with several mass suicides in Switzerland and Quebec.

Also, in the late 90s there was the **Heaven's Gate cult** where a group of about 40 committed suicide believing they would hop on a companion space craft hiding in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet.

The scary thing about most of the people who followed these cult leaders to their deaths was that they were, for the most part, well educated, financially well off people. They didn't start off as quacks. But, they believed that their charismatic leader was something he was not.

If the people of Israel were going to follow Joshua into this crazy scheme of crossing the Jordan to take on the people of Canaan they would need to know that Yahweh was going ahead of them.

And so God said to Joshua, ***"Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses."***

How was He going to do this?

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⁸ Give this command to the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant: 'When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop there.' "

⁹ So Joshua told the Israelites, "Come and listen to what the Lord your God says.

¹⁰ Today you will know that the living God is among you. He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites ahead of you.

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¹¹ Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River!

So, once more, the ark, which represents God's Presence, goes first. This was so important that the people understood it was God they were following, not some whacky idea from a charismatic leader.

Proverbs 29:18 comes to mind again,

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Proverbs 29:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful.

Where there is no word from the Lord on direction everyone will end up doing what seems right in their own eyes. Joshua had a word from the Lord. And he tells the people God entrusted to him, "Come over here and I want to tell you what God told me. God is going to go ahead of you. Watch and see his hand at work."

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¹² Now choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall."

Can you imagine what must have been going through the minds of these people? The Jordan River wasn't a great raging river, but it was during the flood season, verse 15 tells us, and the river can be quite dangerous during this time.

When I fish the Campbell River, during the Pink run, it is usually pretty easy to navigate. I can easily wade in with my chest waders and fly rod without too much trouble. But, later in the season when the river is running high it can get pretty treacherous and scary. Once it gets that high my usual spot becomes a little too dangerous for me to fish. That's when I head to the Quinsam.

When I was a young teenager in Calgary we used to go swimming in the Elbow River. It was about the size of the Jordan. Some parts of it were shallow and other parts not so much, but during the spring run-off it wasn't safe to swim in. If it wasn't for my cousin, Kevin who saved my life I wouldn't be here today. I stepped into an unsafe part of the river and and sunk to my eyeballs and he jumped in and rescued me.

The Jordan River's banks in many places are quite steep and deep, and during the flood season it would be well over the heads of the people and flowing quite swiftly.

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I've baptized people in the Jordan River and it was almost up to my neck. And this wasn't during the flood season. So, I could imagine that it could have been quite frightening for families thinking about trying to cross when the river was high.

So Joshua tells the people that the priests are going to step into this river and when they do it's going to wall up on the one side and everyone could pass through on dry land.

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Now this sounds like a great bit of excitement, but those poor priests who were the first to put their feet in the water must have been quite scared. What if they stepped in and nothing happens except that they sink past their eyeballs? What would that do to the authority God gave Joshua? It would be literally blown out of the water.

Would God be true to His word? Imagine you are one of those priests. As you approach the river it shows no sign of slowing. Your heart begins to beat. You are carrying the Ark, getting closer and closer to the bank of the river and all kinds of thoughts are running through your mind.

Did Joshua really hear from God? What if he's a nutball? What if we are believing a lie? What will everyone think of me if I fail, if I step in, sink to my eyeballs and come out looking like a drowned rat? What if, what if, what if...?

You walk a little further, right to the edge and you and the other priest at the front of the Ark look over at each other. You can see just as much hesitancy in your partner as you feel. You nod at him, pick up your lead foot and place it over the water. Your heart races.

Nothing happens. More questions race through your mind. Would God be good for what He said He would do? Did God in fact tell this plan to Joshua, or was this just his crazy scheme?

You shift your weight off your back foot. Your lead foot gets closer to the water and still nothing. What would be going through your mind if you were in their sandals? Fear? Doubt? You might think, maybe the risk isn't worth it.

Maybe it would be better if we just did the easy thing and went back to Egypt. They would welcome us back with open arms. Should I believe God is going to be good for what he said he would do?

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Friends, this is the big question in life for the Christ-follower. **Will God be trustworthy in my situation?** Will God be good for what he said he would do?

Jesus gave us a mission; ***“Make disciples and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you, and I will be with you always.”*** Will he really be with me if I take the risk of stepping out? What if it's not true? What if I serve or minister to my neighbour and I get rejected? What if, what if, what if...I take a risk and I sink up to my eyeballs? Will Jesus really be there? Did he really mean it when he said he would be with us even to the very end? Can I really trust you, God? Can I trust God with my finances? Can I trust God with my relationships? Can I trust him with my kids, or my parents? Can I trust him with my health? Can I trust him with my life?

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¹⁴ So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵ It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge,

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¹⁶ the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho. ¹⁷ Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord's Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

Just think what a complete waste it would have been if those people did not obey God. They would have missed out on what God was going to do. They would have missed out on all the blessings God had promised them. God did the miraculous because they believed him and stepped out trusting him.

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God has not changed, friends. He promised he will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus gave us a mission and promised he will not leave us alone. He promised that he will go before us. He promised he has prepared good works for us in advance for us to do. And he has promised his Spirit will give us everything we need to do the job he has given us. I believe this is true not just for us as a church, but for us as individuals.

Sometimes, though, God may need to bring us to the end of our resources so the only thing we have to cling to is him. God did that with Moses as a leader. He did it with the children of Israel as a people. He did it with Gideon, with Joseph, with David, and Paul, and he will do it

with us because the number one lesson he has for us is that he is trustworthy, and he will do it.

If anything good happens here at Campbell River Baptist Church it will not be because of our ingenuity. It will be God working through his people who are willing to humbly and courageously take a step into what might look scary, knowing that God will always be good for what he has said.

There is a tension God has called us to live in. We are uncomfortable with that because we don't like mystery. We want resolution. We want all the answers. We want all "our ducks in a row." God sometimes, though, asks us to leave the land familiarity and walk forward into the unknown, knowing that he is going ahead of us into the "Promised Land." That makes an exciting story.



***Crossing Jordan III
Getting Your Feet Wet***

Joshua 3

Week of February 21st, 2016

Objective of this study: To learn to live in the tension between not knowing our future and knowing that God is faithful.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

- A. 1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
- B. 2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
- C. 3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 57** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

Describe a time when you were afraid.

Word (20 - 30 minutes)

- A. What stood out from the sermon?
- B. Read Joshua chapter 3.
- C. Who are the characters in this narrative? What was the role of each of the characters? What were their responsibilities? Flesh it out carefully. Dig deep.
- D. What is the significance of the ark?
- E. Think of some adjectives to describe Joshua.
- F. Find places in chapter 3 that show God as the hero of the story.

Work (30 - 45 minutes)

- G. Describe how the different characters might have felt in this situation. Can you relate to any of them?

Sermon Quote: **"God is the hero in every story... Sometimes our competence can get in the way of what God wants to do through us... God's work cannot be done through the ingenuity of man alone."**

- H. What are the implications for us that God is the hero of our story?
- I. Not that competence or ingenuity are bad, but how might relying on them get in the way of what God wants to do through us?

Sermon Quote: **“We can sometimes hide behind a façade of goodness by doing the right things, when our hearts are black with a critical or judgmental spirit, or some other subtle sin. God does not ask for perfect vessels to use. As a matter of fact, he only uses broken vessels. But he does ask for clean vessels.”**

- J. Have you ever felt like God called you to something that you weren't quite competent for?
- K. Did you take a step of faith and do it anyway? How did it turn out? What did you learn from that experience?
- L. Is there something scary or out of your comfort zone you feel God calling you to now?

Sermon Quote: **“There is a tension God has called us to live in. We are uncomfortable with that because we don't like mystery. We want resolution. We want all the answers. We want all “our ducks in a row.” God sometimes, though, asks us to leave the land familiarity and walk forward into the unknown, knowing that he is going ahead of us into the “Promised Land.” That makes an exciting story.”**

M. Spend the rest of the time praying

Sermon Quote: **“Just think what a complete waste it would have been if those people did not obey God. They would have missed out on what God was going to do. They would have missed out on all the blessings God had promised them. God did the miraculous because they believed him and stepped out trusting that he would be good for his promises.”**