

A Word of Encouragement: Cross Your Jordan in 2009

Don't keep wandering in yesterday's wilderness as this new year begins. It's time to challenge your giants and claim new territory.

I spent the last couple of months of 2008 buried in the book of Joshua. Casual readers might dismiss the narrative as nothing more than a description of military conquests, but when I delve into its pages I discover the revelation of Jesus Christ—our “Joshua”—who invites us to engage in a spiritual adventure beyond our wildest dreams.

The message of Joshua has been particularly relevant to me lately because I am contemplating some big transitions in my career. Change is scary—especially in a time of economic crisis. But when I read Joshua's story I am encouraged to take the risks necessary to claim my spiritual inheritance.

“You are not entering this year alone. Go forward in faith, leave your wilderness behind and take the territory God has given you.”

God is calling many of us today to shift from the wilderness to the promised land. Christians who have grown uncomfortable with the status quo are now contemplating big moves. Likewise, church leaders sense a new stirring to grow their churches and influence our secularized culture. As our desire to impact the world with the gospel grows, we hear the Lord challenging us to take bold steps of faith in 2009.

If you want to see big victories in your personal life, your family and your church in the coming year, consider the path that Joshua and Israel took:

1. Swallow your fears. When it was time to enter Canaan, God had to find a fearless leader. He told Joshua: “Have I not

commanded you? Be strong and courageous!" (Josh. 1:9).

How would you measure your faith level as you step into 2009? Are you dismayed about your finances or worried about your health? Are you crippled by insecurities? The devil waged psychological warfare against God's people in 2008 with news of global recession, political uncertainty and the threat of terrorism. Many believers grew anxious, timid and confused.

There is no magic pill to relieve us from fear's torment. We simply must resist it. We must counter-attack it by confessing God's Word. When fear says, "God will not provide," we must respond by saying, "My God will supply all my needs according to His riches in glory." When fear says, "You will fail," we must respond by declaring, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

2. Put on your full armor. When it was time to cross the Jordan, Joshua commanded the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh to dress in battle clothes (even though, since their inheritance was on the eastern side of Canaan, this was technically not their battle). Too many of us have excused ourselves from the battle because we don't think it is ours to fight. Yet 2009 is not a year to sit on the sidelines. It will not be an easy season, but those who are battle-ready will endure and conquer.

You must bathe this year with prayer and praise. Prayerless Christians will not overcome the assaults that are headed our way. Get ruthless with your schedule, even if you must forfeit a movie, a TV show or an extra hour of sleep to spend time with God.

3. Set ambitious goals. What Joshua set out to do in Canaan was impossible, considering Israel's limited military capabilities. Yet God said to seize Jericho anyway. So Joshua sent spies into the city, and they learned that the inhabitants were actually afraid of them (see 2:9-11).

Joshua's perception of reality changed when He saw the situation through God's eyes.

How many times have you dismissed a dream because it seemed too big? How many years have you set that aside that dream of starting a ministry, a business or a new career? In Joshua's case, he stopped going in circles in the wilderness and instead led God's people to circle Jericho—and the impenetrable walls fell flat! In 2009, find out what God's big goals are for you and zero in on them.

4. Step in the water. The Jordan was overflowing its banks when God told Israel to cross it. They did not wait until the water level went down (see 3:14-17). In obedience to the Lord, the priests stepped into the water first. Then, after they planted their feet in the rushing current, a miracle occurred and the river stopped flowing.

Sometimes we find ourselves waiting for God to remove our obstacles when He is actually waiting for us to take a step of faith. We are the real barrier. You may feel powerless to stop the river, but you must get your feet wet. Once you start moving in the right direction, He will bring the breakthrough.

5. Consecrate yourself anew. Before Israel could take Jericho, God required a renewal of His covenant (see 5:2-4). Every man who had not been circumcised during the wilderness journey was admitted to surgery! We too have been scheduled for an operation—on our hearts.

Many of us are not ready for the challenges of 2009. We need to set aside time for evaluation, reflection and course correction. We must root out sinful habits, adjust bad attitudes, repent of unforgiveness and destroy idols that have stolen our affections. One excellent way to do this is with fasting. This year many Christians will set aside the first 21 days of January to observe a "Daniel fast" consisting of fruits, vegetables and juices. I encourage you to begin your

year with this discipline.

6. Expect new provision. After Israel crossed the Jordan their entire economy changed. They had relied on manna from heaven for their daily food, but when they stepped into Canaan they began to eat the produce of the land—and the manna ceased (see 5:12). They went from eating handfuls of strange, mealy powder to enjoying cartloads of milk, honey, grain and meat; they shifted from scanty daily rations to overflowing abundance.

We can wander in the wilderness so long that we grow accustomed to a hand-to-mouth existence. Our faith shrinks with our limited expectations. We forget that the same God who carried us through the lean times also wants to give us wealth so that we can carry out His kingdom work. In this season of economic upheaval, don't adopt a poverty mentality. Your heavenly Father wants to entrust you with His resources—even during a time when He is bringing economic judgment on the wicked.

7. Expect a visitation. Just before the Jericho miracle, Joshua found himself standing face-to-face with the “captain of the host of the Lord” (5:14). Bible scholars say this was not just an angel—they believe it was the pre-incarnate Christ. This dramatic encounter marked Joshua forever and gave him the faith and courage to lead Israel to victory.

It is the Lord's presence that will sustain you in 2009, no matter what difficulties you face. The One who fights your battles is in your midst. You are not entering this year alone. Go forward in faith, leave your wilderness behind and take the territory God has given you.

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