

Joshua 18:1-3
Home Improvement: The Blessings in the Struggle
May 20, 2012

Introduction:

Today we honor those we call seniors, seniors graduating from high school and seniors in chronological age. As you get to speak with both groups of seniors, my hunch is that they could tell you there have been some struggles getting to this point in their life; but good has come from working through the challenges. I hope they could also tell you how they have seen God at work in the struggles they have faced.

As we kick off a new sermon series to encourage relationships, especially in the context of our immediate families, remember that there can be blessings/ good things come when we are permitted to work through some of the struggles everyone must face. If the challenges are prevented then more harm than good can be done. Today we go to a biblical hero named Joshua who was not afraid to allow his people to find the blessings of God through their struggles in life.

Read Joshua 18:1-10

We need to appreciate the scene in this scripture. This is like graduation time for God's people. This is a transitional moment of looking backward; but also forward for them. They have been a nation of people on the move for 40 years. Now they have arrived in the land of promise. Like our high school graduates that are transitioning to a new stage in their lives, and like those who have passed a chronological milestone, in this story God's people were making a transition, a transition from a wandering people to a people who needed to put down roots in one place.

There were 7 out of 12 tribes that had not taken possession of their

portion of the Promise Land. God is like the heavenly parent, father or mother that has provided the place for Israel to live and thrive. But 7 of the tribes had not claimed their land of inheritance. The goal for these 7 tribes were to take possession of the land. The challenge or struggle was for these 7 tribes to make the transition from being people on the move to mastering a certain territory for their own.

Based on verse 2 all the tribes were gathered at the Tent of Meeting. That is like saying, they were all at church on the same day. Joshua, the father figure to the people said to them in possibly a harsh way, “what are you doing here? Don’t you have something you should be doing? You’re suppose to be taking possession of the land God has given you as his promise to Abraham. The Message version of the Bible translates Joshua’s words in verse 3 to read, **“How long are you going to sit around on your hands, putting off taking possession of the land that God, the God of your ancestors, has given you?” v.3**

There are gifts to find in the struggle v.3

As the father figure to the people, his words remind us of an overarching principle we find in scripture and that is God provides blessings in the struggles we face. It is a principle that ought to apply to our relationships, family and otherwise. Joshua’s question reminds us to not remove all the hurdles others may need to face to experience what God wants to give to them and do through them.

There can be various ways this principle needs to take life in our homes and relationships.

- It may mean that your kids or grandkids cleaning up their room is their room to clean-up; not yours.
- It may mean kids and teenagers are to do their share of chores around the house and it is theirs to do. Until the responsibilities are completed there is no tv/internet or cell phone time, there is

no play time.

- It may mean that the relative that easily waste their financial resources has to learn you will not always be the easy fix for them.

A story like this teaches, don't take away the struggle from others what they need to do for themselves. Joshua didn't.

The struggle gives a chance to affirm: v.4

Joshua told each tribe that still had land to inherit to choose 3 men and he would send them out to assess the land. The blessing in the struggle was Joshua's way to affirm his people. Joshua's instructions communicated he knew those 7 tribes had the right men for the right job at the right time so they could take possession of the land God gave them. His instruction was a vote of confirmation about them in the midst of the struggle.

When the struggle isn't removed, it is a way of saying you have what it takes to do what you need to do. You can cope with the challenge. **The Apostle John once said, "Greater is he that is in you than he than is in the world."** He gave those spiritual words of encouragement to Christians in struggles so they discovered God at work in them.

Illustration: Most Sundays I try and be near the choir room so when the choir is done with warm-ups I can have a word of prayer with them. Most of the times they have the nervous butter flies and they joke about how bad they are going to sing. I would never say oh you better not try today. Imagine how they would feel if Sunday after Sunday before they had a chance to try we took them off the hook from singing? Instead our prayer together is affirmation of how God can use their gifts to help lead our worship of him.

You may have some relationship where your first impulse is to help out. But before you help, consider a story like Joshua's. Maybe what needs offered is your confirmation that someone has what it takes to meet their challenge and handle their responsibilities. The struggle is the chance to be affirmed so they can discover the good God is capable of doing.

The struggle will produce a character of faith v.8 - "So the men started on their way..."

The Bible says, **"So the men started on their way..."**

Joshua engaged the people to taking a step of faith to examine the land of promise. **"They started on their way...."** One sign of effective parenting and mentoring is to help our children "get started on their way" to how God has made them to stand and adapt in life circumstances. The people that were just sitting on their hands as slackers became people on their way to taking action.

The blessing of our struggles help produce the right faith character in us. Romans 5:3-4 reminds us that our **"...Sufferings produce endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope."** There has to be some time spent on the way in the struggle for the character to be produced.

There has to be some time for a child to spend cleaning up after their own mess. It produces some sensitivity of what it takes to clean up after them or maybe next time they won't be as messy.

The teenager can get on their way maturing as they are expected to provide their own mad money for extra clothes or movies or dates.

The person who leans on you to often speak up or stand up for them needs to be on their way in speaking and standing up for themselves.

If the struggle is allowed then it moves people on their way to growing in godly character. Which is part of the blessing.

Illustration:

No one really gets out of this life experience. I was reading an article this week about the grandson of Dr. Billy Graham. A few years ago he was approached about merging his new start congregation with a nationally known church in Florida. He turned down the offer twice, but then agreed to talk, the third time he was approached about merging congregations. Elders from both churches met for months and they finally determined it was God's will to merge the two churches. He writes how they launched their newly combined congregation on Easter Sunday 2009 and all seemed well. **Then ten days into the new marriage of congregations came the disharmony and attempts to smear his reputation and fire him.** The ugly struggle went on for a while until he said he took his family on vacation. He got up one morning while everyone else was still asleep, grabbed a cup of coffee and had a long candid talk with God. He said "He basically let God have it and wanted his old life back." Then he said what he realized was that what he really wanted was his old idols, his false gods of control and ways of living but he said... **"God loved me too much to give them back to me."** (Preaching Magazine March/April 2012)

Wow you're the grandson of one of the most famous preachers and spiritual leaders in the last 100 years. You've launched a new church that has grown so much that a nationally know congregation courts you as pastor and your credibility still gets attacked and on top of that God doesn't provide the easy bailout from the crisis. God doesn't say to you, "I really appreciated all your grandfather has done for me so I am going to take you out of the struggle."

But what that struggle accomplished was to send him on his way to strengthen his character and relationship with Christ that now makes him a better pastor.

I love how in his story he said, **“God loved me too much to give me my false idols back.”** God would not remove the struggle because it was growing his character. There may be a close relationship in your life where it is time to not give someone back a false idol of security, of unaccountability or immaturity.

There may be a relationship in our lives where we need to swallow some pride and realize the way some one has refused to help us is because we need to be on our way somehow growing spiritually like we have not grown before.

There is a blessing in the struggles when we are helping the relationships in our lives be on their way in growing as people and especially as Christians.

The struggles teaches what God will do. v.9-10

Verses 9-10 tells us the men obeyed Joshua and went throughout the land and made a description of the countryside. Joshua gave a portion of the land to the final remaining 7 tribes of Israel. The gift of the land was eventually handed out just as God had promised.

- Maybe Joshua’s people initially stalled at taking the land because they worried about being attacked?
- Maybe they doubted they were strong enough to face the enemy.
- Maybe the person who struggles in your life has legitimate fears and maybe not?

What Joshua’s people needed to experience through the struggle was God was with them and his power could help them complete the entire journey. It wasn’t enough for them to see God working

in someone like Moses to get them out of the crisis of slavery, or in someone like Joshua to lead them the remainder of the way across the wilderness to the promised land. **The mission was complete when the people themselves by the power of God in them could take possession of the land. The struggle taught them what God will do through them; not Moses or Joshua.**

Illustration: In recent weeks our family has been reminded of this principle. It has been very suspenseful to say the least of where I would pastor next. It seemed in February and March the opportunity to receive a call from a church was going to fall into place in plenty of time. Then as many of you know that process just seem to slow down to a snail's pace. The appointment for a new pastor here was made as it should have and needed to be done. Weeks were passing by quickly and it appeared we had no place to serve next. Needless to say there are many consequences and none of them good if you don't have employment. Some of the worse case scenarios began to enter my thoughts. But one passage of scripture came to my mind that helped me put it on into perspective and it blends in very well with this story of Joshua and that is the scripture from **Philippians 3:10**. It states, **"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings...."**

The Apostle Paul wrote those words **during his struggle** from a prison **on his way to being killed for his faith in Christ**. He desired to experience the power of God even in the worst of situations life can dish out.

I can tell you that if you have a struggle today use that struggle as a chance to discover the power of the living Christ in you, don't waste the struggle, challenge or crisis. You may not get the desired outcome you want, but you will experience God's presence and if you have that, don't we really have everything we need? The Apostle Paul, Joshua and these 7 tribes would say so.

In the relationships of your life remember stories like Joshua's and Paul's to help others to discover God's blessings in the struggles.

Life is full of ups and downs good news and bad news. Our oldest grand-daughter texted us last night and said yeah I passed the fifth grade now I have to get 3 shots. If she wants to move forward in school as much as she hates shots she is going to have to take the shots.

Leadership expert and pastor, John Maxwell once said, “My dad told me growing up that in regards to my responsibility about work, you can pay now and play later, or you can play now and pay later; but one way or another you will pay.”

Don't let fear keep you from seeing God at work. Sometimes fear holds us back. We can be like the people I read about in a mountain area of Germany who swore there was a giant in the mountains. The giant had been seen many times by credible witnesses. Eventually skeptics decided to settle the issue once and for all. They discovered the people had actually seen something. They learned that the sightings were at either sunset or sunrise and on days the sun was bright. Researchers discovered the people were seeing a reflection of their own shadows on the hillsides.

“A man named Joshua Allen Harris makes art out of trash bags and places them all over New York City. He will station them over air vents to give them a sense of life. Harris has made a serpent, giraffe, robot and bears. Whatever you think of the value of this kind of art, it can be a kind of parable for those who think they are too bad to be redeemed. We all have met people who thought they were too bad for God to love and use in his work. Maybe you think of yourself as trash, but God sees you as his masterpiece.”
Preaching Magazine, March/April 2012, p.59

Maybe we see our struggles as situations we like to dispose of but God would rather have us make something from them.

Pastor Joe Harding INTRODUCTION:

Walter Payton, was the legendary running back for the Chicago Bears. It is estimated that he accumulated over nine miles in career rushing yardage. But he averaged somebody knocking him down every 4.6 yards on his way to the nine mile mark. His sport teaches us that everyone --even the very best-- gets knocked down. Jeff Quandt, Irving Wallace, Book of Lists, 1980.

Another blessing, payoff from working people through struggles is to let them know you have what it takes to finish even though you're going to get knocked down and face setbacks.