

Week Two: Learning to Recognize God's Presence

Welcome:

Series Review: (Chariots in the Red Sea)

- **Often the best way to see forward, is to look back**
- What are we looking for?

Intro: If I were to describe my childhood in three words, I would say, **I was alone.** Most of my childhood memories are moments, when I found myself in a scary situation alone.

- For example, one day, when I was a kid, probably 7-8 years old, I was at the beach, playing in the shore break in the shadow of the pier when a wave knocked me off balance. When I tried to stand up again, I realized the wave pulled me out a little and the water was too deep, I was standing on my tip toes and barely able to keep my head above water. It was like time stood still. I wondered does anyone see me, can I make it back to shore, and I going to get swept under the pier, why am I alone?
- Growing up I believed, **"I am on my own. If it is going to happen, it is up to me."**
- **Have you ever felt alone? 50-60%** of American adults report feeling alone.

Joshua 1:1-2

- Joshua wakes up one day and is hit by an unexpected wave of loss. Moses is dead. He feels over his head. God informs Joshua, the time has come for you to lead these people, across the Jordan, and into the Promise Land. Maybe Joshua found himself asking these same questions, does anyone see me, will I make it across, why am I alone.
- For 40 years, every decision, every crisis, every miracle Joshua knew, Moses would take care of us. Moses is gone but God makes Joshua an important promise.

Joshua 1:5, I will be with you, I will not fail you or abandon you.

- That day at the beach- As I struggled to get my footing, keep my balance and lean back to the shore, I began to pray a simple prayer, probably the prayer I have prayed more throughout my life than any other prayer, **God, help me.**
- **Matthew 28:20,** "I will never leave you for forsake you."
- Moments later, as I sat safely on the shore, pondering that experience I had this thought and it has helped guide me through life;

I am not alone. God is always present. (repeat)

When we are uncertain about our future and we feel alone, what do we do?

Read: Joshua 3:1-6

If God is always present, why is it so difficult to see Him?

1. Surrender! Verse 5

Explain: Some translations say, consecrate yourselves. I like that translation better. Joshua is not telling them to get their moral, ethical house in order. He has something much more important in mind. Do you remember what happened last time, 40 years

ago, when they came to the same spot? (**Numbers 13-14**) They did not trust God. They were terrified of the enemy, giants in the land. They were looking at the obstacles; rivers, fortified cities, and civilizations trained in battle. What they should have been doing is looking at God. God had just defeated Pharaoh, Egypt, and the most powerful nation on earth. However, they lost sight of Him, they lost the blood trail, and spent 40 years wondering in the wilderness. Joshua wants to make sure that does not happen again. God is ready to act. He has already made some strong promises but Joshua knows it will still require a step of faith. God will never create a life for you that requires no faith. Let me say it this way, if your life does not require faith, somehow you have drifted off the trail. Joshua knows, tomorrow is going to be a challenge, so let's spend tonight reflecting on the faithfulness of God and surrendering our hearts fully to Him.

Illustrate: I was in a situation just like this in 2022. The church had been leasing a farm for 7 years. This is where we intended to build our northern campus. The family was waiting for the owner to pass away to avoid capital gains tax. When he died, the day after Thanksgiving, 2022, we were still desperately trying to recover after Covid. We no longer needed a new building and we could not afford to buy the farm. What was I going to do. First, I have to consecrate myself. I need to get my eyes off all the obstacles and turn my mind and heart back to Jesus. To make a long story short, this was about an 18-month process. God did a miracle, he parted the water, but the key was consecration. I had to look back, remember the faithfulness of God, surrender my plans, dreams, strategies, and heart to Him. I had to believe He is good! I can trust Him to write my story. **This is consecration. Do you trust God with your story?**

God, I trust you with my story

Argue: Jeremiah 29:11, Ephesians 3:20

Apply: We must consecrate ourselves. We must trust God is good and we can trust Him or you will miss the opportunity when it arrives. **Moment of surrender**

2. Focus! Joshua 3:4

Explain: Why would Joshua want the people to stay back?

Illustrate: Zaccheaus, Woman with the Issue of Blood. Often the crowd kept people from seeing Jesus or witnessing the miracle.

Explain: Joshua didn't want the people crowding the Ark. If they crowd the Ark only the first few hundred people would have been able to see. Instead, he left a half-mile gap so every man, woman, and child could keep their eyes on God's presence. Sometimes we get ahead of God and headed down the wrong path. Joshua wants us to maintain enough space so we do not lose sight of Him.

What is blocking your view?

- Noise, schedule, FOMO...

Argue: Joshua 1:8, Hebrews 12:2

Apply: Summer series. Are we making space, are we keeping our eyes on Jesus. Do we believe, God holds my future?

3. Follow. Joshua 3:3

Explain: When God moves, we move! Our goal is to follow Jesus. The Christian life is not just being theologically right, it's not just being morally straight, it is learning to follow Jesus. You can be right and straight but miss what God is doing!

Illustrate: 1997, I was in Seminary, theologically orthodox; morally pure, but spiritually and relationally out of touch. Out of touch with God and out of touch with Tina. In fact, I was so busy working for God and that when God moved, I missed it.

Argue: **John 5:39-40**, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life."

Illustrate: Experiencing God- When we see God move, join Him!

Apply: Where do you see God moving in your life?

When you are uncertain: Often the best way to see forward, is to look back.

When you look back, you discover, I was never alone. God is always present.

Psalms 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

Illustrate: I have another beach story. I was in college, there was a hurricane off the coast, and I had been surfing for a couple hours. The swell was building, 8-10 feet, and I wanted to catch just a couple more waves but it was getting late and before I knew it, it was really dark, I could not see well enough to catch waves, and I was all alone. Everyone else had gotten out of the water. I was sitting alone, in a dark angry ocean, and afraid. Once again, I began to pray, that simple prayer, **God help me**. A few minutes later, I was sitting on the shore, catching my breath, watching the ocean and reflecting on the scary, dangerous situation I had just been in. I said out loud, why am I always alone. The Holy Spirit reminded me once again;

"You are not alone. I am always present."

Invitation