

NPWL 2009-2010 Bible Study
Living Into God's Design – Life Lessons for the Journey
A study of the book of Joshua by Jane Johnson

Leader's Guide

The Book of Joshua

This study gives an overview of the book of Joshua. Throughout nine lessons you will study the major themes and events of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan, as they gain possession of the land God promised to give to their patriarch, Abraham. Following is an outline of the book:

Joshua 1:1-6:27 – God brings Israel into the land of promise

Joshua 7:1-12:24 – The conquest of the land

Joshua 13:1-21:45 – Distribution of the land

Joshua 22:1-24:33 – Joshua's farewell address to Israel

General Notes about the Study

Learning Objectives:

Each lesson is designed not only to help participants understand and interpret the text, but also to apply what they have learned to their daily lives. The book of Joshua is a continuation of the story of God's redemptive acts on behalf of Israel. Therefore each lesson seeks to build a bridge between past events and the text being studied. Because Old and New Testament Scriptures are inextricably linked, each lesson also features a section that connects the Old and New Testaments – *Looking Ahead to Christ's Journey*. The connections made between them will deepen your understanding and appreciation for the Scripture as a whole, opening a window to see the text in a different light. There are other noteworthy events included in the book of Joshua that could not be covered in the nine lessons. I recommend that participants at least scan the chapters that are not covered to enhance their understanding of the book in its entirety. A Bible study is not complete if it does not help us make connections between Scripture and our everyday lives. The introduction to each lesson shapes the theme for the session and encourages the participant to engage the Scripture with their own life story in mind, asking the question, "How is God working in my life?" To further enrich the learning experience of participants, additional activities and a prayer journal are included

in the study. One of the key goals of this study is to encourage the spiritual growth of the participants through prayer and reflection. To enhance the group discussion time, encourage participants to prepare beforehand and to use the prayer focus for each week in their personal devotional prayer time.

Process Objectives:

Develop a pattern for how you will begin each Bible study session. This could include a brief “check in” time with participants to ascertain if there are any joys or concerns that need attention before the actual study time begins. This should not turn into a counseling time, but can be a brief time of sharing followed by prayer for group members. Praying for one another builds intimacy and trust and will help create a sense of community within the group. If you choose not to have a sharing and prayer time, always begin the lesson with prayer to ask for God’s presence and guidance as you study together.

After prayer, give participants a few moments to reacquaint themselves with the introductory story; then present the opening discussion question and encourage one or two people to share their responses. It is best to limit the number of stories shared during the introduction to enable the completion of the Bible study during the session. There will be many other opportunities for people to contribute throughout the meeting. Encourage different people to contribute each week so that all participants have the opportunity to share.

As you proceed through the study, encourage the sharing of opinions and create a safe learning environment by affirming that each participant’s contribution to the session is valuable and welcomed. Always close the study time with prayer. There is a prayer focus at the end of each lesson that can be used.

Relational Objectives:

...a note about story-linking

As an introduction to each lesson in this study, I share a story from my life, following in the African American Christian tradition of linking story and Scripture together. In the book *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*, Anne Streaty Wimberly defines story-linking as “a

process whereby persons connect components of their everyday life stories with the Christian faith story found in Scripture.”¹ The Bible is full of these opportunities to link our stories with God’s story. It is my hope that through the lessons in this study the participants will share their stories with each other—linking their stories with God’s story and, as a result, discover God’s faithful and active presence throughout their lives. In light of this, the relational objectives for this study are:

1. Participants will be strengthened and encouraged by hearing the stories of others and that relationships are developed and deepened.
2. Participants develop a desire for continued study of the Scriptures.
3. Participants grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.
4. Participants will become accustomed to sharing their faith stories with others.

As the Israelites move into the Promised Land, God is shaping them as his people. God is shaping us throughout our lives as well. The process of spiritual growth is a life-long journey. Making a profession of faith in Jesus Christ is the beginning of that journey. God begins the process of what theologians call *sanctification* – the life-long process of being formed into the image of Christ. Sanctification, according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.35), is "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole person after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness."² Throughout our lives we grow to be more and more like Christ. We are “set apart” for God’s work and purposes in the world to be salt and light, just as God called Israel to be a light to the nations. God be with you as you lead your group in learning to *Live Into God’s Design!*

Bible Study Helps

<http://www.bible.christianity.com/>
<http://www.biblegateway.com/>

Online Concordance and Bible Dictionaries

<http://www.biblestudytools.net/Concordances/>

Online Prayers

<http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers.htm> -- Celtic Prayers
<http://www.bcponline.org/> -- Book of Common Prayer online

¹ Wimberly, Anne Streaty, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, [TN], 1994), p.13.

² Book of Confessions Study Edition, (Geneva Press: Louisville, KY, 1996), p.232.



<http://www.biblestudy.org/maps/map-land-of-canaan-during-book-of-joshua.html>



<http://www.biblestudy.org/maps/12tribfl.html>

LESSON ~ ONE

Commissioned by God: Words of Instruction – Joshua 1

Leader’s Note for Questions 2 through 4

At the beginning of the book of Joshua, a new generation of Israelites is on the brink of possessing the land God promised to their forefathers. Their parents did not receive the promise because they failed to believe in and obey God’s word to them. Now they have passed on, and God commissions Joshua with an awesome task. He would stand on the shoulders of Moses and lead the Israelites to possess the Promised Land. A successful conquest would require special instructions. Joshua’s success as a leader hinged on two things—obedience to God and God’s word (the book of the law), and courage. His belief in God’s ability to do what God promised gave Joshua the courage to obey God’s instructions, and following God’s instructions would lead to success.

Leader’s Note for Questions 5 through 7

Joshua 1:8 is the theme verse for the book. Throughout this study you will see that Israel’s successful conquest of the land depends upon Israel’s fidelity to God and to God’s law. As long as they remained faithful to God, they would flourish. If they did not remain faithful they would be destroyed just like the nations whose land they were about to conquer. Whether an individual Israelite or the entire generation continues to benefit from their unique relationship with God depends upon their willingness to submit their lives entirely to God’s will. When they lapsed into disobedience and idolatry, they inevitably suffered defeat and dispersion. When they remained true to God and God’s law, they enjoyed the fulfillment of God’s gracious promises to them.

Leader’s Note for Questions 8 through 10

Frequently, cultural definitions affect the way we view ourselves, set goals, push our kids to achieve, etc. Bringing this to the forefront can help us see what place culture has in shaping our goals and perceptions, versus how God’s word and Christian values shape our perceptions. For instance, I have a friend for whom going to college after high school was assumed. She attended a private high school where the vast majority of students went on to college. On the other hand, I was not even asked by the guidance counselor of the public high school I attended if I planned to attend college—until my senior year, when it was too late to take college entrance exams more than once and too late to take many of the college preparatory classes. I have often thought

that I would have made far different career choices as a young adult if the high school I attended had affirmed and encouraged the gifts of all of its students. What I have accomplished in life is due to a faith that was nurtured in me from childhood, and being encouraged by my mother that God had a good purpose and plan for my life.

Think of a personal story that you can share with the group to illustrate one of the following: What's something that was nurtured in you since childhood? Was there a way in which your mother or father encouraged you to follow/seek God's purpose/plan? What cultural influences have affected the way you view yourself?

Timeline Activity

Have you ever made a timeline of the significant events in your life – times of transition, times of celebration, times of travail? It's an eye-opening exercise. As you begin to connect the dots the story unfolds before you. The story becomes tangible and comes alive. In the recounting of the story we begin to see how God met us at points A and B on the road to point C, and so on.

We need to stop and speak about the journey because we can get so enmeshed in the present that we forget the divine encounters of the past. We need the markers – the points of remembrance of what God has already done. Recalling these gives us hope.

Encourage participants to complete the timeline exercise at the end of the lesson. Take time next week to share insights learned from the exercise.

LESSON~TWO

Stepping Out on Faith: Rahab's Conversion – Joshua 2

The theme of lesson two is acting in faith. It centers on Rahab's encounter with the spies sent out by Joshua to check out the land. Rahab's choice to believe in the God of Israel had life-transforming implications, not only for her but for her family as well. The key learning point of this lesson is that faith is more than just mental assent. Faith that is active is manifested in what we actually do.

Leader's Note for Question 6

The crimson cord, the sign of Rahab's covenant with the spies, can be understood as a foreshadowing image of the blood of Christ shed for the remission of our sin, though there are no specific scriptural references to this. There are also similarities with the sprinkled blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel of the homes of the Israelites at the first Passover.

Exodus 12:21-23 states:

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. ²² Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. ²³ For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.

Rahab was instructed to place the crimson cord in her window, gather her family into the house and stay there. In both cases obedience was an expression of faith, and the safety of the household was obtained through that obedience.

Leader's Note for Questions 7 and 8

Questions seven and eight are leading to the fact that God's mighty acts on behalf of Israel were known to all the people of Jericho. Rahab responded in faith while the King and other inhabitants of Jericho responded in fear.

Timeline Activity -- Participants are encouraged to continue to reflect on their lives through the use of their timeline, focusing this week on the times that called for a special 'leap of faith.'

LESSON~THREE

Moving Past the Obstacle *Crossing the Jordan – Joshua 3* *Significant Memorials – Joshua 4*

This lesson looks at God’s activity in our lives as we are confronted with obstacles.

Leader’s Note for Questions 3 and 4

In both the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, the people did not know what would enable them to cross the waters. They had to step out in faith both times. In both instances God gave his ordained leader instructions on crossing. In both instances God led the way—by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night during the crossing of the Red Sea; by the Ark of the Covenant going before them during the crossing of the Jordan River.

Leader’s Note for Questions 5 and 6

The Ark of the Covenant was a portable wooden chest. In it was placed the covenant (the stone tablets engraved by the hand of God), the rod of Aaron, and a golden jar of manna (see Hebrews 9:1-4, Numbers 17:8-11, and Exodus 16:4). The Ark of the Covenant was the sign of God’s presence with the Israelites. The ark leading the procession signified the sovereign God going in to claim his land. It was only to be carried by the Levities (see Deuteronomy 10:8). The LORD said to Moses in Exodus 25:22: *There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.* Read Exodus 25:10-22 for a full description of the Ark of the Covenant.

Leader’s Note for Questions 7 and 8

The Israelites’ belief in a personal, distinctive God, with whom they could have a relationship, differed from the beliefs and gods of nations they were conquering. God was calling them into a unique relationship in order to make them a blessing to other nations. God said to Abraham: *“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so*

that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 18:13)

Throughout history, excessive nationalism and misinterpretation of Scripture have caused groups to commit great atrocities against others.

Leader's Note for Questions 9 through 11 – Significant Memorials

The Israelites created significant memorials that served as witnesses and reminders of God's active presence in their lives, their relationship with God, and God's actions on their behalf. As Christians, we too have significant memorials that testify to God's gracious actions on our behalf. These include the Sacraments, the creeds and confessions. Can you think of others?

Activity: Making Memorial Stones

Significant memorials are not only those we share corporately with a group. Significant memorials are personal testimonies of God's loving and active presence in our lives as we face obstacles and challenges. This activity encourages participants to take the timeline exercise a step further by making stones of remembrance for times when God helped them to move past an obstacle. It's in remembering that we gain the courage to continue on the journey.

LESSON~FOUR

New Beginnings: Circumcision and the Passover – Joshua 5

In Joshua chapter 5, a new generation of Israelites is about to inherit the Promised Land. God reconstitutes them as a nation by reinstating the signs of their covenant with God: circumcision and their covenant meal, called Passover. Participants will look at the renewal of the covenant relationship between God and Israel, the signs of the Christian's entrance and membership in the new covenant community—baptism and communion—and reflect on God's work in their own lives during new beginnings.

Leader's Note for Questions 5 – 7: Circumcision – the Sign of the Covenant

The use of circumcision was not unique to Israel alone. It was practiced by others in the ancient Near East as well, but God took this secular practice and transformed it, making it the sign of God's unique relationship with Israel. It marked one's entrance into the covenant community. Any male who was not circumcised was in violation of the covenant. They could not have claimed their inheritance without the reinstatement of circumcision.³

Leader's Note for Questions 10 and 11: Baptism

As God was the initiator of the covenant with Abraham and his descendants, so God is the initiator and primary actor in our salvation and baptism. Ephesians 1:4 tells us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. This is portrayed beautifully in infant baptism. "As circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with Israel, so Baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with the Church."⁴

Leader's Note for Question 12

Refer back to the sidebar in the lesson on The Lord's Supper.

Leader's Note – Lesson Wrap-Up

If possible, listen to the hymn "Before the Throne of God" together. It can be heard at this YouTube link, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQQooQHDgq4>, or can be accessed via internet

³ Madvig, Donald H., *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Volume 3, editor, Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1992), p. 273.

⁴ *The Book of Order*, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), (Louisville, KY: PDS, 2005), W-2.3004.

by searching YouTube/ Before the Throne of God Above/Selah. Share together the closing statement and prayer.

LESSON ~ FIVE

Following Directions *The Fall of Jericho – Joshua 6* *The Defeat at Ai – Joshua 7*

This lesson emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's instructions for Israel and for our lives as well.

Leader's Note for Questions 4 and 5

The moral dilemma these passages create for us cannot be overlooked. Scripture portrays God as a God of grace and justice. Exodus 34:6-16 recounts the self-disclosure of God's identity to Moses, and Moses' intercession on behalf of Israel before he receives the second set of stone tablets containing the Law. It provides a rationale for the need to break totally from the current inhabitants of the land in the establishment of the new nation.

Leader's Note for Questions 6 and 7

The purpose of these questions is for participants to give serious thought to how new members are incorporated into the church. They are not meant to suggest that we should isolate new people, but rather to be careful about how we orient them. How might this affect our visitor information and welcome packets, new member classes, Baptism classes, new believer classes, etc.?

Leader's Note for Question 11

Other Scriptures regarding discipline in the church are Matthew 18:15-17 & 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

LESSON ~ SIX

Divine Intervention: The Sun Stands Still – Joshua 10:1-14

Throughout our study in the book of Joshua, we have seen God intervene in miraculous ways on behalf of his people, Israel. In chapter ten, God once again intervenes, this time in response to Joshua's prayers. In this lesson, participants are encouraged to remember times when God intervened in their lives.

Leader's Note for Questions 4 – 6

Some other instances of human effort and divine intervention working hand in hand are:

- The story of Joseph in Egypt in Genesis 41 through 47
- Cyrus, King of Persia, used by God to return the Jews to their land and rebuild the temple in Ezra 1 and Isaiah 45:1-13
- Elijah's triumph over the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:21-39
- Deborah the prophetess and judge who helped deliver her people from King Jabin of Canaan and Sisera, the commander of his army in Judges 4:1-16
- Mary, the mother of Jesus

Leader's Note for Question 9

Here are a few Scriptures that provide guidance to people facing troublesome times:

- Numerous Psalms including Psalm 23 and 91
- Isaiah 43:1-2
- Hebrews 13:5-6
- 1 Peter 5:7
- Philippians 4:6-9

LESSON~SEVEN

Making Room for Mistakes: The Cities of Refuge – Joshua 20

In this lesson participants will:

- Consider God’s instruction to provide cities of refuge for those who killed someone accidentally.
- Compare this arrangement to our modern-day judicial system.
- Look at ways the church provides a refuge for those who need it.

Leader’s Note for Questions 2 – 5

Read Numbers 35:9-34.

Murder was regarded as a serious crime in Israel because the spilling of blood pollutes the land (see Genesis 4:10-11 and Deuteronomy 19:10). God did not want innocent blood to be spilled. Blood vengeance was a deterrent to murder. Capital punishment is the penalty in all cases of murder in the Mosaic Law. The next-of-kin had the right to avenge the death of a family member. Yet God made a distinction between a premeditated act and an accident. God instructed Moses to have cities of refuge appointed after the Israelites crossed the Jordan. These cities provided a sanctuary for those who unintentionally killed someone so that the killer might receive a trial and avoid being killed by the next-of-kin. The offender had to immediately leave his family and possessions and go to the city of refuge. The elders of the city provided protection, made provision for a trial, and determined innocence or guilt. The person was considered innocent until proven guilty. Two to three witnesses were required to condemn someone accused of murder. If the killing was found to be accidental, the offender was granted asylum in the city. Anyone who was found guilty was turned over to the next-of-kin. The location of the cities was strategic so they were readily accessible, and the cities were also open to aliens who resided in Israel.⁵

⁵ Madvig, Donald H., *The Expositors Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, editor, Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1992), p. 273.

LESSON~EIGHT

From Discord to Harmony: Conflict Between Tribes – Joshua 22

Lesson eight examines the causes of conflict and thoughts on resolving conflict. See the sidebar on Resolving Conflict and the section on Unity in the Church. Reading these two sections in preparation for the lesson will give you the overall objective of the lesson.

LESSON~NINE

Joshua's Farewell Admonitions – Joshua 23 *Summary of God's Acts for Israel & Renewing the Covenant* *Joshua 24*

The final lesson in this Bible study deals with being faithful to God and maintaining a distinctive witness in the midst of diverse traditions and faiths. This discussion is of great relevance and importance in light of the changing religious atmosphere in our American society, which increasingly offers a potpourri of options for spiritual growth and fulfillment. There are no extra leader's notes for this lesson. Instead, there are expanded narratives and sidebars. See the sidebars related to the Purpose of the Conquest, Intermarriage with Canaanites, the section on Religious Pagan Practices, and the narrative at the beginning of the Looking Ahead to Christ's Journey section.

Prayer Focus Note

Encourage participants to find someone to share their thanksgiving with by sharing their timeline – either the actual timeline or the oral history.