

September 19, 2010

"STRETCHING YOUR IMAGINATION"

Part 2: 50 Days of Faith Series

Joshua 1:1-11

Every great accomplishment in history began with an idea in somebody's imagination. It started with a thought in someone's head before it actually became a reality. If you want to really live and fulfill the purpose for which you were created, then you've got to dream dreams and stretch your imagination. You've got to think about who you are and what God wants to do with your life; otherwise you just exist and drift aimlessly with no real direction. You need a dream, but not just any dream. You need to get a glimpse of God's purpose for your life 'what He put you here on earth to do.

1st Corinthians 2:9 says, *'No eye has seen, no ear has heard and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.'* God's plan for your life is so amazing; it's beyond anything you could conceive. It is so fantastic; you'd never think it possible. You can't imagine what God could do with your life if it was totally, completely, irrevocably given to Him.

The Bible says, *'With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we could ask or imagine.'* Ephesians 3:20 One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the gift of imagination; the ability to think of what could be. This ability is one of the things that sets us apart from all the other creatures of the earth. You were made in the image of God. You were given the unique ability to mirror and reflect God's image, His character. Like our Creator, you have the ability to create. You have the ability to imagine.

One day a man was arguing with God and the man began to brag. He said, 'I can create human life just like you.' God said, 'Ok. Show me.' So the man took some clay and began to work with it. Before he got very far God said, 'Wait a minute. Get your own clay.'

Granted, the way we create is significantly different from the way God is able to create. He can create something out of nothing. That's how he first created the world 'out of nothing. We can't do that, but we can create using the things God has already created. God has given us the tremendous ability to imagine and with our imagination we create. It was Napoleon who said, 'Imagination rules the world.' And Einstein said, 'Imagination is more important than knowledge.'

This morning I am asking you to stretch your imagination and look beyond what you think is possible to what God says is possible for your life. God wants to use you in ways you've never even imagined. God can take your ordinary life and do extraordinary things with it. He certainly did that with a man named Joshua. This morning we're going to look at Joshua's life and see what Joshua did that enabled God to use him in such an amazing way. If you want God to really use your life, then these are four things you'll need to do. Here are the four secrets to being used by God for His great purpose and plan that we learn from Joshua.

FIRST, YOU MUST LET GO OF DOUBT . Doubt is one of the greatest obstacles to seeing how God wants to use you. Doubt limits your ability to understand what God wants to do through your life. Doubt causes procrastination. Doubt blinds you to God's plan for your life. Doubt causes you

to say, 'I really don't think God can use me to do anything.' It's also doubt that causes you to chase after your own plan, rather than pursuing God's plan for your life because you doubt if God's plan could be more rewarding and fulfilling than your own. Doubt causes you to come up with all kinds of excuses for not following God's plan for your life.

The Bible says, '*Anyone who doubts is like a wave on the sea, tossed up and down by the wind.*' (James 1:6-7) Before you can see God's plan for your life, you've got to deal with your doubts. Do you doubt God is there? Do you doubt He has a plan for your life? Do you doubt He wants to use you? Do you doubt that He has given you the gifts and talents uniquely designed for you to carry out His plan for your life?

Joshua had a problem with doubt. He was riddled with self-doubts. His self-doubts were keeping him from being the leader God wanted him to be. He's why I think Joshua had his doubts.

First, Joshua had self-doubts because his successor was Moses. How would you like to follow an act like Moses? Who wouldn't have self-doubts if they had to follow him? He brought the plagues, convincing Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. He parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross over to the other side and then he let it flow again, killing Pharaoh and all his army. He led the Hebrews for forty years through the wilderness, making sure they had food and water. He talked face to face with God on the mountain and recorded the conversation on two stone tables. It's called the Law of Moses or the Ten Commandments. Moses was awesome. How was Joshua going to follow a man like that?

Second, Joshua had self-doubts because of the task he was given. God said, 'Joshua, I want you to lead this uncooperative, whiney band of ex-slaves, who've been running around the desert for forty years in confusion and fear 'I want you to lead them into the Promised Land and take it over. There's only one problem, Joshua. The land is inhabited with seven enemy nations, all of which are bigger and stronger than your people. That's my plan for you, Joshua. Go get 'em.'

No wonder Joshua doubted his ability to lead God's people. There they were, camped on the banks of the River Jordan, scheduled to go into the Promised Land the next morning and begin a military campaign lasting for years. You think Joshua wasn't a little scared? Four times in the opening chapter of the book of Joshua, God tells him, 'Be courageous; be strong!' Why did God have to keep telling Joshua that? - Because he was struggling with doubt. If God was going to be able to use Joshua, then Joshua was going to have to get rid of his doubts. God tells him, '*Be courageous; be strong! Banish your fear and doubt for remember, I, the Lord your God, am going to be with you wherever you go.*' (Joshua 1:9) The key word here is BANISH. What does it mean to banish? It means to get rid of, eliminate, put out of sight; to send away where it can no longer influence you. If God is going to use you, the first thing you've got to do is - get rid of your doubts. Banish them from your thinking.

Okay. How do you do that? How do you get rid of your doubt? First, you realize that doubting is a choice. Every time you doubt, you are choosing not to trust God. Doubt is a choice, just as faith is a choice. You can choose to doubt God or you can choose to trust God. The trouble is: a lot of people believe their doubts and doubt their beliefs. We need to doubt our doubts and believe our beliefs!

What leads us to doubt that God can do great things through us? Where do these self-doubts come from? One place they come from is when we compare our abilities to the abilities of others. When

we take our eyes off God and start to compare ourselves to others, self-doubt creeps in. 'Am I good enough?' Maybe somebody else could do a much better job at this. He has more experience, more education, or more ability. She has more talent and more self-confidence.' And so on. The moment you start comparing yourself to others you're going to be plagued with self-doubt. God says, **DON'T DO THAT! DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS!** The Bible says, *'It is foolish to compare yourself to other people.'* 1st Cor. 10:12

The second source of self-doubt is when we remember our failures. When we play our failures over and over in our minds like playing a bad scene in a movie, it fills us with self-doubt. When we replay our failures and rehearse them in our minds, we experience them over and over again until we are paralyzed by self-doubt. It's so painful. It's self-torture. Why do we do that to ourselves? God doesn't want us to focus on our past failures. He wants you to let it go of the past and move into the present where He can use you to impact the future. God says, **FORGET THE PAST.** If you keep looking at your past and all your mistakes (and we all have a lot of them), then you're never going to get rid of doubt and realize what God can do through you today.

You're not the only one with imperfections. Have you read the Bible lately? Most of the great leaders in the Bible didn't exactly have a perfect record. Abraham lied about his wife being his sister. Sarah lied about laughing when she overheard the promise from God that she would become pregnant and bear a son. Isaac imitated his father's lie. Jacob cheated his brother out of his birthright. Moses lost his temper and killed some guy. Aaron made an idol. Joshua refused to completely drive the Canaanites out of the Promised Land, which opened the way to an awful religious compromise that finally destroyed Israel. Gideon made an ephod which became a snare to all the people. Samson gave in to licentiousness. David, a man after God's own heart, was also an adulterer and had an innocent man killed. Solomon, despite all God had given him, at the end of his life became caught in idolatry for the sake of the women he had taken to himself. Elijah, as great as he was, became trapped in deep despondency after his victory on Mount Carmel.

In the New Testament we have Paul who called for the murder of Christians before his conversion. Peter was a man of great strengths and weaknesses, often putting his foot in his mouth. All these people had failures and still God used them to bring about His plan. God can use us, too, if we will refuse to let our failures cause us to doubt that He can and will use us.

The **SECOND** secret to being used by God is to **LOOK FOR A PROMISE**. Thirteen times in the book of Joshua the word 'promise' is used. In Joshua 1:3 God says, *'I promised Moses that I would give you this land. So I will give you every place you go in the land.'* (Joshua 1:3) God's promise to Moses became God's promise to Joshua. At the end of Joshua's life he was able to say, *'Now my time has come to die and every one of you knows that God has given you all the good things that He promised. Every promise He has made has been kept. Not one has failed.'* (Joshua 23:14) God's promise to Joshua became God's promise to all the people of Israel, and God is still in the business of keeping promises. He will do what He says He will do.

Do you want to be used by God and make a real difference with your life? Then get into the Bible and read God's promises. There are over 7,000 promises in the Bible. They're like blank checks waiting to be cashed. If you want to grow in your faith and be used by God, then you're got to build your life on the promises of God.

God gives us three promises in the first chapter of Joshua. God promises three things to those who trust Him and give their lives to Him to be used for His great plan. He promises strength. He

promises success and He promises support . These are the antidotes to weakness, failure and discouragement. When we give our lives without reservation to be used by God, He gives us the strength we need to be successful, and He promises his support. Joshua instructs us, *'Always remember what is written in this book. Study it day and night to be sure to obey everything that's written there. If you do this, you will be wise and successful in everything.'* (Joshua 1:8) Through His strength we achieve success and find the support we need to go on doing His will.

The THIRD secret to being used by God is to LEAN ON THE LORD . Don't try to do it in your own strength. Leaning on the Lord is more than just believing. It means turning to God for strength to carry you through whatever it is you're going through. God promised Joshua, *'No one will be able to defeat you for the rest of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.'* (Joshua 1:5) As long as Joshua leaned on the Lord he was undefeatable. That's what we have to do, too. If we want God to use us for His great plan, we need to do it in His strength.

Who or what are you leaning on for strength, for success, for support? Is it another person? Is it the approval of others? Is it yourself? Is it your money? Is it your health? Is it your intellect? All these things can be taken away. They can fail you. But God will always be there to give you the strength to be successful and He will support you through it all. Proverbs 3:5 & 6 tells us, *'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all of your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.'*

The FOURTH secret to being used by God is to STEP OUT IN FAITH ! There comes a time in your life when you have to stop thinking about it and do it. Step out in faith in spite of your doubts, claiming God's promises and leaning on Him for strength . It doesn't have to be a big move, but you need to do something that shows your faith in God's promises and your willingness to lean on Him. For Joshua it was getting the people ready to cross the Jordan River. That was the moment of truth for him. He was going for it. He was stepping out in faith and he was taking everybody with him.

How do you think God is calling you to step out in faith? What do you think He wants you to do for Him? King Solomon warns us, *'If you wait for the perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done!'* Ecclesiastes 11:4