

WELCOME:

Good morning Everyone. Hey how many of you are familiar with the infamous Joker character from the Batman stories? Show of hands. Yeah, most of us! And do you recall the Joker's famous question to Batman...when He looks at him and says, "*Why So Serious?*"...I was thinking about that this week, cuz this has felt like a pretty SERIOUS last year hasn't it? And even more, as adults/maybe especially church-going adults - let's be honest, we have this knack for taking ourselves more seriously than we probably should - me being chief among those who can EASILY choose ways of living that keep us from just celebrating the good news, that in Christ, we are free to be loved, accepted and provided for apart from any of our religious or moral efforts! We're free to get off the hamster wheel, as it were, of progress, performance, self-improvement and level'ing up, knowing that the work Jesus came to accomplish of loving, accepting and wanting to save us is, as He said, "*Finished!*" And so the only thing left for you and me to do is simply relax, awaken-to and believe that - To, as **John 6:28** says, "*just believe in Jesus whom the Father has sent!*" And there's no better way of doing that than in an embodied way with other Christ-followers together!

So all that to say, "*Welcome!*" to this first in-person Sunday Gathering of the summer. Not re-booting "church," but AS the church, re-booting coming together in a way that strangers can become neighbors, not just across a screen but in real life; and neighbors can become friends; God-willing friends become family in Christ, and family become missionaries FOR Christ...And so what that means is these Sunday Gatherings aren't gonna be particularly formal, but they will be FAITHFUL to what it means for the church to gather. As I heard one person say, "*The church has always been most dynamic and effective when she's stood in stark contrast to the dominant culture of the day - zigging when the world is zagging. And the most creative, prophetic way to stand in opposition to today's digital age is to lean into analog opportunities. To gather in-person when the world scatters. To slow down at a park together when the world speeds up. To commune with God and each other in simple ways when the world critiques.*"¹...SO we'll pray. We'll sing/acappella even/and if I can sing acappella, trust me, anybody can. We'll study and discuss the Scriptures as we continue our "True Myth" series, and in all of it - even with planes flying above, and dogs sniffing out our gathering, and kids maybe getting a little antsy - we'll just enjoy participating and being present together as Christ has promised to be present with us. Cuz look, none of us have ever come back from COVID, so this is all new, and bound to evolve, WHICH MEANS we'll actually get to practice two things that are really close to God's heart: **One**, showing grace to each other! And **Two**, praying for one another!... Amen!

Ok if you're following along in your Order of Gathering, that was the "*Welcome.*" You're Welcome. So let's move now to hear our **Call to Worship**, which is just a fancy way of saying, let's let take a deep breathe together, and before we do anything else, allow ourselves to hear FIRST from God through His word...**Call to Worship > Personal Prayer > Responsive Prayer > Gospel Proclamation > Singing...**

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/analog-church-digital-world/>

INTRO:

Well done everyone!...Hey, if you have a Bible or your Order of Gathering make sure you are looking at our teaching passage for the day. As I mentioned earlier, we're continuing our "**True Myth**" series and today looking at the book of **Joshua**, which is a kind of bridge book from everything we've seen to this point. And you'll see it in the first few verses when we read the passage in a second, but Joshua starts with a transition FROM the leadership of Moses during what was known as the age of the patriarchs, when ya know, the nation of Israel was called, formed, multiplied, delivered, and trained to NOW the age of God's people occupying the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua - Moses' long-time assistant and one of the two faithful spies, you might recall, from the book of Numbers.² And so the book of Joshua really kind of ushers in a new season of life for God's people...**Now let me ask you a question: In new seasons of YOUR life, what tends to be your focus?** Like when you're starting a new job, or moving into a new apartment, maybe beginning a new relationship, even for us as a church in a new season of in-person Gatherings - what do you focus on? **Anyone**...Yeah! You focus on what it's gonna take to be successful in that season right? Ya know, what new initiatives, innovations, or just instructions you're gonna need to BE successful...The assumption at the beginning of **Joshua** is that God's people/this new generation/in a new season of life, are gonna get some new instructions for how to find SUCCESS. And YET what you're gonna see is God remind us that while people and seasons change, His purposes/really His definition of **success**...doesn't! So let's hear the reading of God's word from **Joshua 1:1-9**. And as you're following along, see if you can pick up, both **HOW God defines success** and **WHAT success looks like**, since we all know understanding true success can really make or break you. So let's hear God's word...

Lorna Intro's Self > Joshua 1:1-9.....

TEXT:

Thanks **Lorna**...So there's a couple of phrases that stick out aren't there? Actually, 2 phrases or ideas that are repeated 3 times each. **Ya see em? What are they?** Yeah! **First**, the idea of being "**strong and courageous**" in **vv.6, 7, and 9**. And then God reminding Joshua that HE's gonna be with him no matter what. "**I'll be with you. I won't leave you;**" "**the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.**"...Now the reason I point those out, is because the repetition here is intentional. See as Joshua's on the brink of the Promised Land, looking out, as **vv.1-4** show, on all these different peoples and their armies, and himself being commissioned to take them down, YET only being on the job for ONE day at this point, GOD wants him to know what's gonna carry he and the people to success - or negatively, what's gonna keep em from the failure they'd experienced in the book of Numbers when they refused to go into the land. In other words, He wants em to understand "True Success." **And how does God define Success here? You see it?** He defines it as **DEPENDENCE** upon Him! "**Joshua, if you're courageous, which is to say, you're actively, boldly, fighting to trust ME and trust that I'm with YOU, THEN you'll find success!...Be courageous because you know I'm with you!**" **You see?** It's not: "**be strong and courageous, and oh by the way, if you're ever not, I'll step in and help you,**" which unfortunately is how a lot of us tend approach the Christian life right? - as this kind of 75/80% me and working

² James Montgomery Boice, *Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 12.

out of my strength and thank goodness God's there to cover the other 20/25% if I ever need Him. No! It's not God helping those who help themselves. Or God being your co-pilot. Or even God blessing you on the basis of your thinking, saying, doing and achieving. It's God telling Joshua/ AND you and me, *"This is about you seeing that you can do NOTHING apart from me. Joshua, success is not you being strong and courageous in-and-of-yourself, but you being strong and courageous as a result of believing that I'm with you!"* In other words, God's definition of success/what's gonna make Joshua successful is not his ability to fight, strategize, self-actualize, level-up or anything of the sort. It's his willingness to depend on God! In the economy of God's kingdom, THAT'S how He defines success and a successful life... Which I know is hard for our have-to-have-something-to-bring-to-the-table hearts to grasp, but you gotta understand: That's the way God has always defined success in the Christian life! If you were to jump forward in the book of Joshua, for example, you'd see that as Joshua depended on God and lead the people to depend on God, they were victorious! Managed to go 7-0 in battle, including taking down the city of Jericho by merely blowing trumpets... But they came upon a tiny little tribe named Ai... they were shockingly defeated! And I say shocking, cuz you understand, that was the Red Sox having swept the Yankees, Astros, Giants and Dodgers and then loosing to the New Orleans Baby Cakes (and yes, that's a real minor league baseball time)... Unthinkable... But **Joshua 7:1** tells us why. It was because, quote, *"the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things."* They started trusting things OTHER than God and assumed they could take down Ai in their own strength... Until they couldn't!... Later in the NT, one of the most striking examples Jesus ever gave of success and a person who successfully attains the kingdom, was that of children. As He said in **Matthew 18:3** *"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven."* And you gotta understand, children in that time were not valued and even worshipped like today. No! Children back then were considered less than dogs, because at least dogs could feed themselves. And YET, Jesus is saying, in the economy of His kingdom, success looks like being a child, **because what's the distinguishing mark of children?** Their inability, their weakness... their DEPENDENCY right?... Recently, I've been meditating on **Galatians 5:6** because like you, I wrestle with what it means to be successful, especially when things feel UNSuccessful and everyone around me/even Christians are always wanting to put forward their highlight reels and project their best-selves and appear image-managed, and just NOT "Cheugy," which to show you I'm getting older/I learned this week is a word young folks use to mean: not quite basic or lame, but still a little basic and lame, and just kinda off-brand³... And so I'm reading **Galatians** and it says this, *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."* **Can I translate that for you?** *"...Neither your most conscientious morality, religion and religious activity, NOR you disregard of religion and religious activity amounts to anything... In Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision count toward success."* The only thing, that's saying, that counts/the only thing that God considers success, is *"faith working through love"* - depending on Him in such a way that it provokes you to love Him and others! That's it! Which is why, similarly, **Romans 14:23** says, *"For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."*... Did you know it's possible to do and accomplish a lot of great things/even great things for God and

³ <https://caughtinsouthie.com/features/sorry-southie-but-youre-cheugy/>

God consider it failure? - Or as **Isaiah 64:6** says, God consider “*even your RIGHTEOUS deeds/ your most successful achievements, but which are not rooted in dependency, consider em like a polluted garment to Him*” - literally like a bloody tampon!... That’s a bit of an unnerving isn’t it? To think that you and I may be trying so hard not squander success/even what we might call “Godly success,” that we’re actually missing it entirely/missing simply depending on God and letting Him “fight” for us?... I love the way John Newton said it. He said, “*One great cause of our conflicts is that we have a desire to be rich - and it is the Lord’s design to make us poor. We wanna gain an ability of doing something - and He suits to convince us that we can do nothing. We want a stock of power (or control) in ourselves - and He would have us absolutely dependent upon Him.*”⁴

And you say, “*Why? Why’s He so concerned about our dependency?*”... Friend, it’s because, He’s so concerned about your joy! You see in **v.8** there? God kinda summarizes His instructions to Joshua saying, “*For then you will make your way prosperous, and will have good success*”? **See that?** He’s talking about Joshua holding fast to His word, which we’ll get to in a second. But overall what He’s showing you there is: He cares about your success, your prosperity... your joy! Similarly, later in **John 15**, Jesus gives a parable/really on His understanding of a successful life. And He says that success, or as he calls it “*bearing much fruit,*” comes from “*abiding*” or being dependent upon Him, like a branch is dependent upon a vine. But then at the end of the parable He says this, “*These things/meaning this parable I’ve spoken to you, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full.*” God is utterly concerned for your joy. BUT He knows you won’t ever enjoy true joy apart from Him. Cuz even though we like to think of ourselves as independent; we’re not! We’re very dependent - on our surroundings, our upbringings, our genetics, opportunities we’ve been afforded and not, all kinds of things. And so the issue’s not WILL you be dependent, but will you be dependent on the RIGHT thing? And God knows the only right thing on which you could depend and NOT end up disappointed... is Him! And so He calls/even, at times, forces your hand to get you to depend on Him... Because, at the end of the day/hear this: ***The most successful IN Christ are not those who do the most FOR Christ, but those who’ve learned to DEPEND the most ON Christ. Success equals Dependency!***

So **Second**, if that’s HOW God defines success/Dependency upon Him, then and **WHAT does Dependency practically look like?** It looks like... write this down... A life rooted-in and consumed by His word! And you see that in **vv. 7-8** when God tells Joshua to “*be careful to do according to all the law...to not turn from it...not let it depart from his mouth, meditate on it day and night, and be careful to do according to all that’s written in it.*”... Now notice: He’s not saying, “*Joshua, if you really prioritize my word, that’ll MAKE you dependent upon me,*” though to be sure there’s some truth to that - What He’s saying is, prioritizing my word is a mark THAT you’re depending on me! Cuz look at the language God uses. It’s the language of, again, being consumed by God’s word. He says, “*you’re to meditate on it day and night,*” meaning there’s to be such a familiarity with the Scriptures that it consumes your thoughts. You filter your decisions not through pro-and-con lists, but through God’s promises and precepts. When you’re struggling

⁴ Newton, John. The Letters of John Newton . Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.

emotionally, you turn to God's word as a way of checking, calibrating or even pressing into your feelings. In other words, there's a depth of understanding with God's word because you're so concerned about **DEPENDING** upon Him!...But not **ONLY** that, cuz He says, "*Joshua, also, be careful to not just know my word but to do according to all of it and not turn from it,*" meaning not just that we know God's word, but that we obey it too. And even more, that we don't get to pick and choose what of it we obey...Did you know in the Smithsonian, there's an old Bible that belonged to Thomas Jefferson. And it's fascinating because large sections of it are just cut out. Cuz in Jefferson's day/much like ours, the academic world had turned against any kind of belief in miracles. They were considered unfashionable/uneducated. **BUT** the morality of Jesus was still thought to be great. **SO**, Thomas Jefferson literally cut out every supernatural passage in the New Testament **SO THAT** he could have a Bible with just Jesus' moral teachings...Similarly in the Bible Museum in Washington, DC, there's another edited Bible called the "slaves'" Bible, where slave owners literally cut out sections of the Bible they believed would lead slaves to think they were equal with their Masters. To justify their perverse morality, they had to cut out certain areas of obedience.⁵ We don't do that. We don't edit what we obey!

So there's a depth of knowledge...There's a breadth of obedience...And there's a zeal to share. God says "*Joshua don't let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth.*" And the image there is of muttering God's word under your breath. In Orthodox Jewish circles you'd study God's word by speaking/sharing it, muttering it; the idea being, as Harry Miller right there, who you might know is in academia/as he reminded me during our last Missional Family meeting: our bodies and our minds learn together. Which is why songs so easily get stuck in our heads. As you're singing or "muttering" it, it starts to become a part of and flow out from you! So too we're to be constantly speaking and sharing God's word as a **MARK** of dependence...You see? ***True Success is Dependency MARKED by being consumed with & simply taking God at His word.*** You wanna be a real success in life - especially in God's eyes? Just take God at His word! Strive to be as dependent upon Him, as He's revealed Himself to be, as you can be! **THAT'S** success!

GOSPEL:

So let me move to close here: IF that's true success/and it is, let me ask you: ***How successful are you?*** Be honest!...And I'll just speak for myself here, but if that's success, then honestly, I'm just not sure I can call myself anything but a failure! Cuz, you guys, sometimes I look at my inability or unwillingness to depend on and take God at His word, and I just get discouraged. I have a little journal app on my phone, which if you were to read, you'd see it, because I'm all the time asking myself things like: Why won't I just trust God rather than get anxious, or depend on God rather than taking things into my own hands. Or even more fundamental: Why are my affections for God so cold, when I see that in depending on Him I have everything I could ever need!...***Anyone else feel that?/Probably not*** 😊...Well, in the off chance that you do 😊...can I just tell you: God hears that cry of desperation, because in that cry you're expressing your **DEPENDENCY**. And as ***Psalms 51:17*** says, "*a broken and contrite heart He will not despise.*"...

⁵ Illustrations cited in "Courage in Babylon" // Daniel 3:1-29 // *Shining in Babylon* #3 - J.D. Greear

And here's why: Because behind Joshua and His story here, is a better Joshua...named Jesus! Cuz literally, Joshua's name in Hebrew is Yeshua meaning "*God is salvation.*" JESUS' name is a derivation of that meaning, "*Savior.*" Jesus is the true and better Joshua, because see while Joshua's success ultimately came by virtue of His dependence upon God; that dependence didn't last, and ultimately the people stopped depending on God, which caused em to lose possession of the Promise Land, and really for the rest of the OT, be forced to live in captivity to the Assyrians, Persians and Babylonians, such that the very clear implication throughout the rest of OT is that God's people/you and me NEVER depend on God like we should. And that our only hope for success is NOT to make ourselves incrementally more successful through different disciplines, techniques, or practices or something - which is like trying to become a little bit better at triple jumping the Grand Canyon - but to be SAVED by One who was PERFECTLY successful at depending on God on our behalf...That's Jesus! Because as Jesus Himself said in **John 5:19**, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing,*" meaning Jesus never did anything/or even uttered a word that wasn't born out of perfect dependence on the Father. And He could do that because He was God. As He said, "*I and the Father are one.*" But more than that, He was WILLING to do that, even though it cost Him His life, BECAUSE of His love for you! As **Hebrews 12:2** says, "*for the joy that was set before him, He endured the cross.*" What was the joy that was before Jesus that could give Him the strength to endure the cross? You...me...His church! The prospect of having you enjoy Him without fear that you need to prove yourself TO Him/having you rest in His success for you rather than being worried about making yourself a success apart from Him. Basically, just being assured that in Him, you're always at home, always loved and always His delight and desire regardless of how successful you may or may not appear to others!

And so He willingly/joyfully endured the Cross - taking all the ways you and I fail to depend on God - on Himself - so that we could take all the ways He's succeeded at depending on God, on ourselves. In other words, Jesus was perfectly dependent on the Father in your place, so that YOUR success, wouldn't ever have to be based on how dependent you are, but rather on how dependable He is FOR you!

And so really, the only thing you and I have to do, is in a sense, just repent of both the ways in which you DON'T depend on God, but ALSO the ways you in which you DO...but in your own strength. In other words, just take Him at His word that He is your success and then enjoy that!... Kinda like if you found out someone unexpectedly paid your bar tab, utility bill, or mortgage payment without you even knowing it and so that you didn't have enough to pay it yourself. You just trust that it's paid and then enjoy the freedom of not having to pay it yourself!

It's good news isn't it? And ironically the more you believe it; the more you actually find yourself wanting to depend on it!...Can you imagine if the metric for our success as followers of Christ, and as a family of Christ-followers was simply how dependent upon God we could be? I dare say that'd bring about some serious freedom and joy...***So let me ask you: Are you willing to ditch the striving and performing and image-management and finally depend on the fact***

that Jesus is your success? What would it look like for you to awaken to that today? ...Take a moment to think about that, after which we'll spend a couple minutes discussing in groups...

DISCUSSION:

So at this time, we're just gonna spend a few minutes discussing in groups. If you'd like, you're welcome to move around and get with others in your Missional Family. If you're not connected to a Missional Family, no problem, just jump in with some folks near you. They'd be happy to have ya/even share with you about their Missional Family. But spend a couple minutes discussing, *What would it look like for you to depend on God and what He's accomplished for you in Christ*, after which I'll send us out with a short blessing, and for those of you that wanna hang around, we'll enjoy some food together. So go ahead and start discussing...

SENDING:

Alright folks, come on back...For those of you that are gonna hang out and enjoy some food together, I encourage ya to continue the discussion we've started and even share where you sense God working or see God working in and around you...But in the meantime, "Family, as you are sent out this week, let's give thanks: *For the prayers that were prayed, the song that was sung, the Scriptures that were taught, the discussion that was enjoyed, the food we're about to eat, Lorna for graciously organizing it, and the opportunity for neighbors to become friends, friends family, and family missionaries! So until we meet again, may we be sent out joyfully depending upon our utterly dependable Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thanks you are sent...to eat together...*