

Pastor Kyle Mercer  
Make It Over & Mark It

February 5, 2023  
Series: Taking Ground  
Joshua 3-4

**BIG IDEA – MAKE IT ACROSS AND MARK THE OCCASION**

Good morning, Two Cities Church. That's my Community Group. I love my Community Group. One of the things we do is we have these bold prayer nights together. You heard about that. Here's what we're trying to do: We're trying to have a culture of prayer. We're trying to have an atmosphere of prayer. We're trying to have an environment of prayer.

Here's what we mean by this. The opposite of an environment of prayer or an atmosphere of prayer or a culture of prayer is zipper prayers. Do you ever pray zipper prayers? *Zipper prayers* are when you begin and end things with prayer. Now, I'm not here to beat you up; I'm here to build you up. If you do zipper prayers with your family, you're doing better than 90 to 95 percent of Christians in America.

Here's a zipper prayer. Before Johnny goes to school you say, "Johnny, come here real quick. We've got to pray." Or you're tired, Mom and Dad, and your kids are upstairs. You want to go to bed, but you decide you're going to crawl upstairs and kneel next to your kids' bed, and before they go to bed you're going to pray. Or before your wife or your husband falls asleep, for a minute you guys say, "Let's just pray before we doze off." Great.

Those are zipper prayers. It's beginning and ending things. We want to create a culture of prayer here. I don't know how to say it any more simply and any more succinctly. Here's what we're about: making disciples, mobilizing them for mission, and doing all of that in an environment of prayer and worship.

So, why two weeks ago did we have the elders up here and said, "Come forward for prayer"? Culture of prayer. Why did we start the year giving you this 21 Days of Prayer, which I hope you and your family have been able to walk through? Culture of

prayer. Mark your calendar, March 20. It's a Monday night. We're doing three prayer nights this year. That's the first one. It's going to be a night of prayer and worship. It's our desire to have a culture of prayer.

Now, you don't have to do bold prayer nights like we just did there, but I will tell you it has been exciting for our group. Did you see us cutting cake in that video? Some of you go, "Do you eat cake at all of your Community Groups?" No, that would be really cool if we did that. No, we don't do that.

That cake was there because a year ago, last January, one of the couples said, "We're struggling to get pregnant. Will you guys pray for us?" That video was shot on the night where they did the gender reveal cake. Come on, guys! That was an answer to prayer a year ago.

Now here's our ask for you guys. We like to keep things really simple here, but also very biblical. Here's what we're asking: Would you pray with each other and for each other? That's how you start a culture of prayer. Here's what this means: you have to ask for prayer, and you have to tell other people you're praying for them.

Listen. Husbands really struggle to pray with their wives, and here's why: spiritual intimacy is deeper than sexual intimacy. A lot of couples will be sexually intimate but won't ever be spiritually intimate, because prayer is the closest point between two people. So, let me just help the husbands out. Here's how you pray for your wife. You say, "Honey, what can I pray for you?" and whatever she says, next you say, "Lord," and then just repeat exactly what she said. She will feel very loved.

Guys, we want to believe God for big things. William Carey, the great missionary, said something like, "I expect great things from God, and I attempt great things for God." That's the spirit, the mindset, the heart, we want to have in this church. Let's pray, and then we have an exciting two chapters in Joshua 3 and 4.

Lord, I pray for a culture of prayer in our church and a culture of prayer in our homes, a culture of prayer and worship. The last verse of Genesis, chapter 4, very early in the Bible, says, "At that time men and women began to call upon the name of the Lord." I pray for Mom and Dad to call upon the name of the Lord. I pray for Mom and Dad to pray for each other. I pray for homes where people say, "I'm struggling. Will you pray for me?"

I pray for relationships. When we come to Community Group, we're saying to the people in our Community Groups, "I genuinely have been thinking about you and praying for you this week, and I'm believing God for you." Lord, I pray that we would see so many answers to prayer that would strengthen and encourage our faith. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. Anybody else starting to use artificial intelligence or just me? Have you heard of this new website? There's a new website, ChatGPT. It's so popular that most times when I go to this website it's down. It's getting overloaded so many people are trying it out. Here's what it is. I don't know who's running this, and I don't know how it works. I also don't know how my car works. It just works. I turn it on and it works.

I don't know how artificial intelligence works, but I've been going on here, and I've been using it. In fact, I asked it to write me a few sermons, and it did. They weren't that good. I didn't preach them. But it can write a sermon. I'm like, "Here's the text. Write me a sermon." This thing is really smart.

One of the things I did recently... I went in there, and I thought, "I wonder if it could summarize really complex things for me." So I said, "Summarize the entire *Lord of the Rings* series for me in one sentence." It said, "Frodo Baggins goes on a quest to destroy the One Ring and to fight the Dark Lord Sauron with a fellowship of friends." I thought, "AI is going to take over the world."

How would you summarize the entire Bible in a sentence? It's not easy to do. I mean, it's 66 books written across 1,500 years by 40 different people in 3 different languages. There's an Old Testament. There's a New Testament. It's easy to get lost in the trees and lose the whole forest.

So, let me give you the whole Bible in a sentence: *God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing*. That's the whole Bible. We all long for Eden. What was Eden? Adam and Eve (God's people) in God's place (Eden) under God's rule and blessing. What was lost when our first parents ate from the tree? We were no longer in God's place, and we were no longer under God's blessing.

Why did Christ come, and what's all this preaching and teaching about the kingdom? Do you ever wonder that? Like, "Jesus talks about the kingdom of God all the time." The kingdom of God is that place where God's people are in God's place under God's rule. If you go to the book of Revelation, you're like, "What is the new heavens and the new earth, and how does the Bible end? Oh, it's God's people in God's new place (heaven) under God's rule and blessing, worshiping him."

I tell you that because in Joshua 3 and 4 (that's right; we're going to cover two chapters quickly today) we see God's people are going to cross over the Jordan. We've been longing for this, because we've had God's people under God's rule and blessing, but they've not been in God's place. They've been in the wilderness. Before that they were in Egypt. Today, they cross over, and it gets two chapters.

This is really important, and this is good to know. Whether you're a business guy or a business gal or you lead something or you're a dad, this is true. There are always two

stages in leadership. There is *vision leadership* and there is *get-it-done leadership*. Vision leadership is where a lot of people want to live. "Okay. We're going to be *this* type of family, and we're going to go do *this*." Or churches... "We're going to baptize *these* people, and we're going to reach *this* city."

Guess what? People will only put up with vision leadership for 18 months. You have to quit telling people where you're going to take them if you're never going to take them there. Get-it-done leadership has to happen. Get-it-done leadership is where people see progress. People will put up with a lot if they're seeing progress.

Today they cross over. Here's the whole of chapters 3 and 4 in a sentence: *make it across and mark the occasion*. Chapter 3 is "Make it across," and I'm going to show you how to do that today. Then the first verse of chapter 4 is "Mark this moment for you and for your family and for the next generation." That's where we're headed.

We'll start in chapter 3, verse 1. ***"Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim."*** He wakes up early in the morning. Why? Because the day before, the last verse of chapter 2, the spies come back and say, "God has given us the land. God is faithful. Let's go." So Joshua says, "I'd better get up early."

If you want to write a phrase down in your Bible...*immediate obedience*. What do we teach our kids? "Delayed obedience is disobedience." What do you teach your kids when they're young? "Obey right away with a happy heart." Let me ask you this: What is the last thing God told you to do? That's the thing you should do. God is not going to give you a next thing to do until you do the last thing he told you to do.

For some of you, he told you to give, and you haven't given. He told you to serve, and you haven't served. He told you to pray, and you haven't prayed. He told you to forgive, and you haven't forgiven. He told you to confess, and you haven't confessed. I mean, who knows what it is?

There's something theologians call the *dimmer-switch principle*. The dimmer-switch principle is you get more light when you obey the light you've already been given. You don't get more light until you obey that. This is why some of you are in the same place: you haven't obeyed the last thing God told you to do.

Notice also he rises early. I don't want to push this too far, but could most of us get up earlier than we do? Some of you get up at the crack of dinner. Let's be honest here. Most Christians throughout human history... Now, there are some who can find it other places, but most people have to get up early to meet with God.

I love what Charles Spurgeon, that famous preacher, said. He said something like, "May I look into the eyes of God before I look into the eyes of any man." I told my kids

this, and my daughter Addy said, "Was he married?" I said, "Yes, he was married. It's a great line. Okay? Maybe he looked at his wife before he read his Bible. I don't know."

R.C. Sproul, famous Christian, famous pastor, theologian... When he was older, he was saying that he was wasting 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. at night. He used to go to bed at 10:00 and wake up at 6:00. He'd get his eight hours of sleep. He said, "I'm wasting that time," so he started to go to bed at 8:00 at night to get up at 4:00 in the morning. This was before social media and streaming. I'm not sure what he was wasting his time on, but you could waste your time even back then.

He was wasting the last two hours of his day. He wasn't redeeming the time. So he found out, "I could be more efficient, more faithful, from 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. than I was from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m." The principle is getting up early. There was an article written years ago called "Slay Your Dragons Before Breakfast." The whole idea of that article was "Do the most important things first, and if possible, do them before you eat breakfast, because that's when the day really begins."

So, the first thing he does is immediate obedience. We see that. He gets up early. He goes out. Now look at what it says here. That was just the beginning of verse 1. ***"And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over."***

He takes them to the Jordan and makes them camp there for three nights. Why would you do this? Here's a principle of counseling. I don't know a lot about counseling, and I'm not a counselor. Those are the airbags on this. But here's what all counselors basically believe. There's a lot they don't agree on. That's fair. What they agree on is you have to voluntarily confront that which you fear.

That's mostly what counseling helps you do. "Hey, you haven't faced your marriage" and "Hey, you haven't faced your mother-in-law" and "Hey, you haven't admitted to yourself that you're addicted to this." We have to face it. We have to look at it. Part of what you do as a pastor or a leader is you say, "Come here. I'll look at this with you. We're going to face this together. Let's look at this together."

You have to look at the Jordan. This is the worst time to cross. By the way, God will often ask you to do things when it seems like it's the worst moment. We know from the account that this is April. We know that in April was when the waters were the highest. It's a mile wide. There were other times when they could have crossed, and it would have been more efficient. It would have made more sense. God often will ask you to cross at a time that doesn't make much sense to you.

So, here they are. They're in front of the Jordan. They have to camp there for three nights. That means they go to bed and hear the waters. That means every morning they wake up and stare at this Jordan, and they know, "We have to cross this, but I have to look at it first."

Then they were about to cross. Let me give you the four things that happen when you cross. Look first at verse 2. I'll give you the first one. ***"At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, 'As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it.'"***

The first principle of crossing is *prioritization*. God goes first. This is why the ark is talked about. So many of you are new. You weren't here this summer. This summer I talked a little bit about the ark when we were in the series on David. I'm going to come at it from a little bit different angle.

The whole point is the ark is God's favorite piece of furniture in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it's the throne. In the Old Testament it's the ark. The ark was a box, but what was important was it represented the presence of God because of what was in it. What was in it was three things. There were the Ten Commandments. Why is that important? Because we need the Word of God because it's the direction for our lives. Great. Got it.

The second thing was Aaron's rod, his staff. That was the power of God. That was the protection of God. That was the miracles of God with Pharaoh. Then the final thing was a little jar of manna, a little Krispy Kreme doughnut they put in there. That was to remind them that God provided for them for 40 years in the wilderness.

When we look at it that way, we say, "This is awesome. Isn't God awesome?" But also, don't forget this. This is important. That's if you look at it from a God-centered perspective, which we need to first. Do you know what the ark also represented? Man's failure. Because what were the Ten Commandments?

Do you remember the first time Moses came down with the Ten Commandments? He got so angry he broke them. Awkward conversation with God afterward. "Can you make a copy of these?" When you see the law of God, yes, it's God's perfect, infallible Word that directs us, and it's also a reminder of our failure.

How about the rod and the staff? It's like, "Oh, yeah, that's the power of God." That was the fear of Moses. Do you remember? Moses was so afraid of Pharaoh that God finally said, "Fine. Get Aaron." Then he threw the stick down, and he was afraid of the stick. God said, "Pick it back up." The staff represented our fears. How about the manna? Yes, God's provision and their complaining.

That's why what was on top of the ark was the mercy seat, because mercy will always be over all of our sin and all of our failure. You have to remember the ark is the closest thing we have in the Old Testament to the cross. Just like when you look at the ark, when you look at the cross you see two things: "God is great, and I am sinful."

So, the ark goes ahead of them. Now look. It's very interesting. Verse 4: **"Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length."** I'm guessing none of us measure in cubits anymore. We're American. We're the only ones who do feet. It's hard to realize the rest of the world is wrong, but we do feet.

So, 2,000 cubits would be 3,000 feet or 1,000 yards or (think of it *this way*) 10 football fields. That's how far ahead it was. He tells us why. **"Do not come near it..."** So, don't get any closer. Here are two reasons. **"...in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before."**

This is a very important principle: God goes ahead of us because we don't know where we're going and we've never been there. If you realize, this is your whole life. Every time you do something important, it's for the first time. You're like, "I'm leaving my home for the first time."

When's the first time you leave your home? The first time you leave your home. The first time you get married is the first time you get married. The first time you have a kid is the first time you have a kid. The first time you get cancer is the first time you get cancer. The first time you have a grandkid is the first time you have a grandkid. The first time you retire is the first time you retire. You're a novice. You're new at it.

We all want to act like, "Oh, I know what I'm doing when I go into this stage." No, we don't. What God is saying is, "Let me go ahead of you, and you follow me." A good definition of *sin* is I'm trying to get God to follow me. I'm trying to get God to follow me as I'm stingy with my finances or superficial in my spending or getting myself in enormous amounts of debt.

God is like, "I don't follow you there. I have this whole 'Give, save, live' plan if you'd like to follow me. This is how *I* do things." We want to go, "God, follow me over into this toxic relationship with this non-Christian guy." God is like, "Uh, no. You follow me over *here* into a godly marriage." Repentance is I realize I've been trying to get God to follow me, and I need to turn around and start following God.

So, God goes ahead of the people. Here's a principle for life. This is not some "name it, claim it" principle. This is a true principle. It's called the *principle of blessing*, and it's if I want God to bless something, I need to put him first in it. That's the principle. If you want God to bless your marriage, I know the secret to it. It's not easy, but I know

the secret to it. It'll be to put God first in your marriage. That's the principle of blessing on your marriage.

Now you'll have to answer... Everybody's marriage is different. What does that look like? I don't know. I can ask the question. You're going to have to answer that question. You'll have to ask God that question, and then when you ask God that question, you'll have a bunch of things come into your mind, mostly things you don't want to do, and those will be the things you have to do to put God first in your marriage.

Do you want God first in your finances? The principle of blessing financially... This doesn't mean you get more money and get promoted at work. The principle of blessing in your finances is "I have decided to put God first in my finances." That's why we say, "Give, save, live."

We give first to honor God, we save second to be wise, and we live off the rest and teach ourselves contentment. That's the biblical principle of blessing on finances. What does it look like for God to be first in your family? What does it look like for God to be first in your career? It's the principle of blessing. God goes first. God goes ahead of me.

The second principle is the principle of *consecration*. Look at verse 5. ***"Then Joshua said to the people..."*** Here's a word we never use anymore. ***"Consecrate yourselves..."*** What does *that* mean? ***"...for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."*** Now that's what we want. We want the second part; we don't want the first part.

God says, "I will do a wonder if you will first do the work." God says, "I will do a miracle if you will obey this mandate." God says, "I will fulfill my promise if you will pay the price." We're like, "Eh, I want the promise without the price. I want the miracle without the mandate. I want the wonder without the work."

Here's what we need. We need the word *consecration*. Now, you've never heard that word used. It sounds religious. It sounds old school. Here's what the word means. It literally means dress yourself rightly. That's what the Hebrew means. There are two components to consecration. There's *expectation* and there's *preparation*.

If you want to live a consecrated life, the first thing is, "I am excited, and I want God to work in my life. I want him to work in my marriage. I want him to work in my family. I want him to work in my neighborhood." It's the principle of expectation, which is the opposite of how most Christians live.



Most Christians are complacent, and they run through the motions. We want you to show up here...I *hope* you show up here each week...like, "I'm expecting God to move. I am expecting God to change me. I need to get my kids here because I'm expecting God to... God works here."

Why are camps, why are retreats, why are conferences...? I've been trying to figure this out. Why are they so important to people? Why does God move in such a miraculous way at camps and conferences and retreats? Is it because they're a couple of days long or a week or two long? Maybe. That's certainly a reason.

Is it because we get you out of your normal and natural environment? Yeah, that's probably also helpful. I think it's the spirit of expectation that's around the retreat or around the camp or around the conference. I'll tell you who doesn't have that spirit of expectation: the person who goes for the first time, usually.

In the summer, we send our kids to as many camps as possible. "Come on, guys. Go." What's interesting is every time I go there, I meet the camp counselors. These camp counselors... On paper, it doesn't look like a great job. "Live in a cabin with a bunch of kids younger than you all summer. Get up early. Stay up late. Have no breaks. Eat camp food all summer." It's like, "No, thank you."

When you talk to some young girl or some young guy, and they're going to be a camp counselor for 7-year-olds all summer, you realize, "Oh my goodness. They've been coming to this camp for 15 years." I was talking to one of my son's camp counselors. He said, "Oh, yeah." He said this proudly to me. He goes, "The first summer I came here I wet the bed." I was like, "How young *were* you?"

He came when he was 7 years old. God had done such a work in his life. What you do as a camp counselor is you just go, "Okay, you little 10-year-old boys. You have no idea how God is going to work this summer. I have such expectation for you." There is just a spirit of expectation that's around camps.

When I got here, everyone was talking about Camp Merriwood. "I came to Christ at Camp Merriwood. My kids came to Christ at Camp Merriwood. I was a camp counselor." It's all expectation. We need more of a spirit of expectation. I walk into my home, and I expect God to work. I walk into my business, and I expect God to work. I walk into my neighborhood, and I believe God is at work.

So, that's the fun one to talk about. You know, "Yeah, expectation. Let's all be excited about it." You're not going to like the other part. It's *preparation*. It's basically, what do you need to stop doing? It's not really a fun conversation to have. Or maybe, what do you need to *start* doing? Those are usually different things.

Sometimes you need to stop doing things. You need to stop doing things that go against your own conscience. You need to stop doing things you're hiding. You need to stop doing things that make you weak. You need to stop doing things you're ashamed of.

Then you need to start doing a bunch of things. Who knows what *those* are? A lot of things, probably. Maybe you could manage one or two new things you could start doing. You need to start being around the right type of people. You need to start reading your Bible.

The other thing you're not going to like about *preparation* is... The word *consecration* is almost always, in the Old Testament, used to talk about our sexuality. I told you you weren't going to like this part either. Our sexuality is where our brokenness is most clearly felt and where our rebellion is most clearly seen.

There's a "Get your sexuality in alignment with the Word of God and submit it to the Lord," and it's hard for all of us because we're all broken sexually. There is a blessing on the other side of being fully submitted to the Lord and saying, "Lord, I want to be a clean vessel who you can use."

I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking, "I'm not very consecrated, and the Lord is using me." Well, maybe he could use you a lot more. Maybe you haven't even seen how God could use you if you would be fully devoted to him. John Wesley used to say something like, "Give me 10 men who love nothing but God and fear nothing but sin and will take on the whole world."

So, it's the principle of consecration. (I need to prepare my heart.) It's the principle of prioritization. (God needs to go first.) Then here's a strange one: the principle of *exaltation*. Look at verse 7. ***"The LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I will begin to exalt you...'"*** If you're Joshua, you're like, "No, God. I exalt *you*. This is weird. You exalt me?" Look at what he says here.

***"The LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.'"*** I want to talk about a theology and a biblical understanding of exaltation, because the Bible talks about exaltation in three ways, one of which you're going to go, "Of course," and you're going to nod your head, and it's going to make a lot of sense. The other two are going to bother you, probably, if you've never heard them before, which you probably haven't.

The first one is *we exalt God*, and that makes sense. We're like, "I get it. That's the whole Psalms. That's what we just did when we sang songs. I praise God in my own prayers. I thank him for who he is. When I share Christ with other people, I'm

basically praising God to other people. I get all that." We feel really comfortable with we exalt God.

Here's the second one that we don't feel comfortable with but is true: *God exalts God*. It's an interesting thing to think about. If you can't get there emotionally... We live in a very man-centered world. It's like, "Okay. Does God love anything more than you?" The answer is "Yes...himself." Think about it. Just think about it logically. Emotionally, it'll mess with you a little bit if you've never heard this. You'll be like, "God sounds big and scary when we talk about him this way." Well, he *is* big and scary in a way.

Think about it *this* way: if God loved anyone or anything more than himself, he'd be committing idolatry. That's an interesting thought. We struggle with this because we shouldn't exalt ourselves, so it sounds weird. "God, why are *you* exalting yourself?" C.S. Lewis wrestled with this, the really smart guy who wrote Narnia and all of those books.

He was like, "I don't understand it. God is always telling people, 'Praise me. Worship me.'" He's like, "That sounds like self-exaltation." Then he realized, "Wait a second. It's wrong for us to exalt ourselves because it's not right for people to look to us, because we can't meet all of their needs, but God is the greatest being that ever could exist, so when he says, 'Look to me,' it's actually the most loving, fulfilling, thrilling thing."

So, we exalt God. That's clear. God exalts God. In fact, what's interesting... If you ever read your Bible, look for the number-one motivation for why God does everything he does. What's at the bottom and the basement? It always ends with "For my glory." Why did he save us ultimately? For his glory. Why did he create the world? For his glory.

The third one maybe makes others of us feel uncomfortable. It's that *God exalts us occasionally*. It's right in the text. It's not the first time that happens. He's going to exalt Solomon. He's going to exalt David. He exalts Joseph to prominence. God does this. Now why does this bother us? Because self-exaltation is the essence and root of all sin. We don't like it when people exalt themselves.

We live in a social media world right now where everybody is trying to exalt themselves. Do you ever go on that person's profile, and it says, "I'm a public figure"? You're like, "You have 22 people following you." You go on someone else's, and their description of who they are is "Consultant and life coach." It's like, "You're 24. You have to live some life before you can be a life coach."

Everybody is all about "What is the filter? What is the story? How many pictures of myself? Who can I get a picture with that would be status-enhancing?" We are

obsessed with self-exaltation, which God hates, but Jesus does teach exaltation. "He who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." Who exalts? God does.

Now what's the purpose of exaltation? I want to speak about this carefully. Why did God exalt Joshua? To help the people pass over the Jordan. God will often give a person a platform to help other people cross over the Jordans in their life. That's the purpose of God exalting someone. I could give you a ton of examples.

Think about Dave Ramsey. Some of you have prayed and asked Dave Ramsey into your heart. Dave Ramsey is a person who God, I think, has exalted because he has helped a ton of people re-prioritize their finances and get out of debt. God exalted him, and he used it for the good of other people.

Have you ever heard of Joni Eareckson Tada? At 17 years old, she was a brand-new Christian, and she had a diving accident and became a quadriplegic. Over the last 50 years, I believe God has exalted her, and she has an unbelievable ministry to the physically disabled.

How about John Piper? John Piper is the least cool-looking person you have ever seen in your whole life. He's 75 years old. He wears all of these old clothes. He has his glasses, and he just kind of walks up onstage at Passion, and there are a hundred thousand students there. The whole point of a platform is to help point people to God. All he does is he gets up there and talks about the glory of God for 50 minutes, and everyone is like, "This is amazing."

How about Tim Keller? Many of you may know *that* name. If you've ever wondered, "Why is there among pastors a love for the city, a recovery of church planting, and an emphasis on gospel-centered ministry?" Well, there are a lot of people who helped with that, but the main person is Tim Keller.

So, God often will exalt somebody. Here's how you know if you're exalted. Has God given you affluence or influence? By the way, affluence and influence are used for people who don't have affluence and influence. That's the purpose of it. It has to be voluntary, but that's the purpose of it. Or is there anyone in your life who looks up to you for leadership? God has exalted you in your life.

God exalts every parent in their kid's life for at least a season. When your kids are young, they think you know everything, and then they turn 4. Do you remember this? The stages kids go through (this is well documented, seriously) are "My parents know everything. My parents don't know everything. My parents are idiots." Then they graduate college. "My parents knew a lot more than I thought." We all went through those stages.

The job of a parent is to be a Joshua, to say, "God has exalted me in your life for a season, and the main purpose of that is to help you pass over." So, what you normally need... If you're in some kind of addiction, you're looking for a Joshua. "Has anyone overcome this? Does anybody know how to do this?" This is going to happen naturally. We need people to follow.

I've met a lot of women recently who were like, "I never read through the Bible in a year until I found *The Bible Recap*. Tara-Leigh Cobble has helped me understand the Bible." She's in the top five podcasts in religion right now. God decided to raise up, to exalt this lady, and she has been helping a lot of people, but especially women, walk through the Bible every year for years. Do you need a Joshua to help you get over or do you need to be a Joshua to help someone get over? You're going to be both in the course of your life.

The principle of prioritization (God goes first). The principle of consecration (we need to prepare ourselves). The principle of exaltation (God often will exalt us or exalt another person to help other people). The final principle is the principle of *participation*. Turn with me to verse 12.

***"Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man. And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the LORD of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap."***

This is the quintessential story of "Nothing happens until we obey." I don't know how it happened in America exactly. In America, we think belief is intellectual assent. We think it's like, "Here, read this statement of faith," which, we have a statement of faith. "Hey, read this statement of faith and make sure you believe all this." Well, you only know what you believe by how you behave.

For example, if you go to Hebrews, chapter 11, it's the hall of fame, basically, the hall of faith. If you go in there and read Hebrews 11, I don't know what anyone believed. Go read Hebrews 11. It doesn't tell us what they believed. It tells us what they *did*. What's interesting is we often want a Red Sea miracle, and what God wants to do in our lives is a Jordan River miracle.

A *Red Sea miracle* is when one guy gets to go ahead (Moses). He puts his staff down. Everything parts, and everyone goes, "That was cool. Okay, let's all walk through." A *Jordan River miracle*... If you noticed it, it says the water doesn't part until your foot touches it. You have to step out. Let me show you this. The priests are an example of this.

***"So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people..."*** The priests go first. Drop down to verse 17. ***"Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan."***

Our desire here is to raise up a generation of, to use this word, priests. A priest is basically someone who sees themselves as a spiritual leader. At the Red Sea it was just Moses. At the crossing of the Jordan it was all of the priests. A priest is a spiritual leader, and a spiritual leader is somebody who says, "I will go first, and I will stand in the middle until everybody else gets across." Those are the two things priests do.

Now, did everybody have to step in the water before it parted? No, just the spiritual leaders. They're the early adopters. When I think about the history of our church, it was our launch team. It was like, "Okay, all we have are the promises of God. Thirty of us moved here, we don't have a building, we've never heard Kyle preach, and we don't have any money. Let's just take our next step."

The beautiful thing is when they stand in the middle and make sure... There were three million people. They make sure every person makes it across. That's a picture of spiritual leadership. I want you to know that's the heart of our pastors here. This is kind of a sober and somber way to think about ministry, but I think about pastoral ministry (this is what I was taught from older men) as helping people get to heaven and helping people die well.

I was just with a group of pastors this week in a different state, and one of the pastors... He's a young guy, and he took over one of those kind of First Baptist historic churches...not here, but in another area. He said to us... He was telling our table. He said, "Guys, we did 100 funerals last year." I thought, "That may be us one day." That *will* be us one day, probably.

Part of our job... If you want to be a spiritual leader, you go first, and then you stand in the middle and make sure everybody else gets across, and then you go over. By the way, guys, this is a miracle, and we're grateful for miracles. We believe in miracles. We pray for miracles. We still think the greatest miracle God does is the conversion of a soul, but miracles are unique. That's why we call them *miracles* and not *Monday*.

They're called *miracles*. It's when God uniquely intervenes in human history and suspends the natural order and law of things. We don't see it a lot. It happens in Scripture. It happens in the book of Acts some. What's interesting is if you ever read a book on theology... In most books on theology, there's a chapter on miracles, and right next to miracles there's a chapter on providence. If I had to oversimplify how God works in the world, it's miracle and providence.

*Providence* is "I'm organizing and ordering everything in your life, good and bad, for your good and my glory. I'm somehow working your marriage that you're not happy with right now and your neighborhood that you hate and the job you don't love and the illness you're sad about and your kids breaking your heart... I'm using all that, and I'm using all of the good things. I'm using it for your maturity and my mission."

God basically says, "I play chess, not checkers. Everything is moving toward checkmate, and sometimes it looks like I'm losing, but I'm not. Sometimes it looks like you're losing, but you're not." That's even more amazing, in one sense, than miracles. A miracle is cool because, for a moment, God intervenes. Providence is cool because he's working everything together for your good and his glory.

Okay. So, they make it across. They do it because Joshua leads them. They put God first, they deal with their own sin in their lives, and they take the step of faith...all of the things we need to do to cross. Then look at what happens. Look at the first thing that happens in verse 1 of chapter 4. ***"When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua..."*** Like, immediately, the first thing, as soon as they get over.

***"Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe."***

We don't know how big these stones are. They're probably pretty big. We do know that from the Jordan River to Gilgal, which is where they're going to camp out... By the way, Gilgal is what next week's message is about. It's the most important place in the Bible that you've never heard of. It's their place of operations, basically, in the Promised Land.

Anyway, they have to take these stones eight miles. It's a commitment. They're going to build this monument at Gilgal. Look at what it says here. Verse 5: ***"And Joshua said to them, 'Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel..."*** He tells us why.

***"...that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to***

***the people of Israel..."*** Here's the second thing. First he said a *sign*. Now he says, "***...a memorial forever.***"

Here's the principle: you and I have spiritual amnesia. It's something called a *noetic effect of the fall* by theologians. The noetic effects of the fall are the effects of the fall on the mind, and one of the effects of the fall on the mind is we forget things. Have you ever just walked into a room and were like, "Why did I come into this room?" Have you ever called someone, they picked up, and you were like, "I have no idea why I called you"?

There used to be a time where you had to remember things. They actually did this interesting study where they said the iGen is having more senior moments than the older generation, who are actually seniors, because they've never had to memorize anything. We used to download information to our brains; now we download information to our phones.

I'm 38. I'm still old enough... I had to remember all of my friends' phone numbers. There were no cell phones. I had to remember *my* phone number. Do you remember when you had to remember how to get to a place? My dad is 65. It'll be Christmas or we'll be at the house. He's like, "All right. We're going to go to this new restaurant. Now, Kyle, here's what you do. Go down Academy..." I'm like, "Dad, just give me the address! I don't need to know how to get there. It's 2023. I have an iPhone."

I have several friends who live in Lewisville-Clemmons. I could not get to their house without my phone. So, there's a need to remember. It's interesting, because they tell us we only remember 10 percent of what we hear, which is super-encouraging to me, someone who teaches for a living. We remember 20 percent of what we read. We remember 80 percent of what we see.

I have a couple of friends (maybe some of you are this way) who bought record players recently. I'm like, "What? Have you heard of the iPhone? Have you heard of Spotify? Why are we going back in time for the record player? You can only play one record at a time. It's only going to have a few songs." Then I realized it's about the whole experience. It's about the collecting of the records. For some people, it's about remembering what it was like when they were growing up. It's all tangible.

We need our own ways to mark moments. I'm embarrassed to say this, because I've been here for six and a half years, but I finally went to my first Wake basketball game, which was a great experience. I went a couple of weeks ago. You go into a Wake basketball game, and what do you see hanging everywhere? You see all of these banners. You look up, and you go, "Wake used to be good." Right?



What's the purpose of the banner? The purpose of the banner is to recruit. You bring in some star senior at another school, and you just go, "Look around. Look at all of the things we've won in the past." It's to encourage the current team. "You're part of this history of winning at basketball."

It's supposed to be one of the competitive advantages when you play at home. "I want you to see all of the times we've won. It's just hanging in here, and I want you to look up at it and see it." We need our own versions of that. Look. I'll show you how they mark it. Verse 8:

***"And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there."***

This is one of the first monuments in the Old Testament. We might say *statues*. It's interesting, because as a nation right now, we're having a conversation about monuments. We've been having this conversation for four or five years as a nation. It's really interesting, because there are certain conversations I'm like, "Are we mature enough to have this conversation?"

The conversation is not really... I won't get into a bunch of examples, but the conversation is not over the statue as much as it's over the story that's connected to the statue. A lot of times we read things and go, "How silly. They put a bunch of rocks." No, there was a story and a sign connected to it.

It's important that when you make it over, you mark the moment. In fact, look at what Joshua does. He doesn't just mark it publicly. Look at what he does in verse 9. ***"And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day."***

It's interesting. From what we can tell from the text, God doesn't tell Joshua to do that. God says, "I want you to go to Gilgal, and I want you to make this monument for all of the people to see so that when your children ask you'll have a story to tell them about what the monument means," and then Joshua decides, "I need to do something for myself. I need a personal memory of what God did here."

Let me encourage you to consider marking three things, three monuments. Have monuments that bring your kids back to the Bible. I'm continually hearing stories of (I'm encouraged by this) parents and grandparents who are taking Bibles and doing Bible in a year or Bible over a couple of years. They're taking a bunch of notes in their Bible, and then they're giving it to their kids. "Hey, God speaks to me. I'm somebody

who knows and loves the Word of God. I want to pass this on to you, and I want you to love it too."

I heard one pastor say he's longing for the day when a boy comes down the steps of his house to find his dad is crying, reading the Bible and asks, "Dad, what are you crying about?" and the dad says, "Sorry, I was just reading the book of Acts. I just want God to work like this. I'm reading about the miracles in the book of Acts, and I want God to move like that in our family. I want God to move this way in my workplace. The Bible is having a huge effect on me right now. Sorry it brought me to tears."

We need stories and markers that point people back to the Bible. We need markers that remind people of church history. You should read about George Whitefield. You should read about John Wesley. You should read about Charles Finney. You should read about Billy Graham.

Read about Jonathan Edwards. Read about the first Great Awakening and the second Great Awakening. When you read that, what you'll realize and what you'll communicate to your kids is, "We're living in a desert, and this is not normal. God has moved in power in the past, and we should long for God to move in power again."

Then we need personal monuments. I'm reading this this week, and I'm like, "I've got to figure out a way, in the next few years, to get my kids up to Pine-Richland High School." It's in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It's where I came to Christ. I came to Christ in the LGI room. There was an after-school event that a youth ministry put on, and the youth pastor taught the gospel there, and that was where I finally decided to walk the aisle. I got the Bible. I have to take my kids into that room and say, "Guys, I have to tell you the story."

I have to take my kids to Brookwood Baptist, a small church in Elon, North Carolina, where I was convicted that I needed to be baptized as a brand-new Christian my freshman year of college. I need to take my kids to Smith dorm where I lived for four years on Elon University's campus. I lived in the same room, 111. I need to take my kids in there.

It'll be a little awkward for the freshmen in there. "Hey, guys, get out of here. My family of five needs this room for a minute." You know, "Our senior year, there was a group of five of us who prayed at 7:00 in the morning every Friday morning for this dorm in this room. Do you see right over there? That was where our futon was, and Jason came to Christ right there. He's a business guy in Atlanta now."

We need stories of how to pass on the faith. I came to Christ March 28, 2001. I'm like, "Why have I never celebrated that?" Why haven't I said, "Guys, we're going to do

something awesome tonight. Let's go somewhere. We're getting dessert. We're going out. We're going to just celebrate, because this was the day God changed your dad's life." We need to tell more stories.

Christ goes before us in all this. Joshua is what theologians call a *type of Christ*. It just means he's a pointer, he's a picture, he's a parable of Christ. Joshua went before the people into the Jordan River, and Jesus Christ said, "I will go before you as well." The priests stood in the middle of the Jordan River until everybody passed, and Jesus said, "I'm going to stand in the middle until everyone passes, and then I'm going to let the waters of the wrath of God come on me."

Jesus' whole life was about consecration. Though he never sinned, it was all about consecration. In fact, the Bible says he had a great expectation for the cross. The book of Hebrews says, "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross." Then he decided at the end that he was going to mark it. He said the night before, "Hey, guys, this is a meal we're going to celebrate until I return that marks my death for sinners like you guys."

He gave us baptism. These are the two markers and moments. The church forever... One of the things that makes the church the church is we regularly celebrate these two markers and moments. And they're not just for us. They're for the next generation as well. It's interesting. A lot of hospitals, including Wake Baptist, have a bell in the cancer center. I don't know if you know this.

What happens is when you go into remission, when you no longer have cancer, on your way out of the hospital, you ring the bell. You go, "Why are you ringing the bell? I mean, you already got the clean report, and you've already told your family and friends, and you've already celebrated." I found this out: the bell is not for them.

The bell is for every person still in the cancer center, because it's always someone's first day in the cancer center. When you hear the ringing of the bell, it's like, "Somebody made it to the other side." They marked the moments. By God's grace, we need you to make it to the other side, and we need you to mark it for you, for your family, and for the next generation. Let's pray.

Lord, would you help us make it across? We know it's overwhelming. Some people, when we talk about consecration, just feel so guilty. They feel so dirty. Lord, we know we'll never clean ourselves up perfectly. We know you use us just as we are in many ways, and we know it's because of the righteousness of Christ that you give us a righteous robe. Lord, we know you go before us.

I pray you'd give us Joshuas. There are some people in here right now, and they feel so lonely. They're just looking for one person who could help them cross some

addiction or some struggle in their marriage or some financial pressure or something, Lord. I pray you would raise up a Joshua in their life, Lord. For others, it's like, "Wake up. What an opportunity. What a platform God has given you."

Lord, there's nothing more exciting than being used in other people's lives to help them cross the Jordans you're leading them through. Lord, would you help us mark it? We're so creative in so many areas of our lives. Would you help us to be more creative in marking the most important spiritual events in our lives and the life of our family? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.