

INTRODUCTION

Some East Texas moms have come up with a great idea for the next season of the television show *Survivor*. Six men will be dropped off on a deserted island with one minivan and four kids each for six weeks. Each kid plays two sports *and* either takes music or dance classes. Each man must take care of his four kids, keep his assigned hut clean, do laundry, correct homework and prepare meals. There is no access to fast food. The men must shave their legs and wear makeup, which can only be applied while they are either making four lunches or driving the kids to practice. Each man must attend a weekly PTA meeting and make a miniature Indian hut from four toothpicks, two paper clips and a tortilla. They must make a four-year-old eat an entire serving of peas. The kids get to vote them off the island based on their performance. The winner gets to go back to his job.

Starting this morning, we are going to look a real group of survivors. In the Old Testament book of Joshua, you discover a group of people who survived forty years of desert wandering. They were standing on the border of the Promised Land. They were getting ready to move—finally—into a new land and a new adventure. Green Acres is at a similar place, because after five years of planning, and two-and-a-half years of building it’s time for us to get ready to move—finally! We will be in our new facility in a few short weeks and it will certainly be a new adventure!

For the next four weeks, I will lead us through a portion of the book of Joshua. We can learn from a group of folks who’ve done what we are about to do. I’m calling this series “Share the Joy.” Let’s read about these survivors:

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses’ aide: “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your feet, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land that I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you will be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:1-9)

Today, I want us to learn three things from this group. First, consider:

I. THE MISTAKE WE MUST AVOID

Let’s put this event in its proper historical context. If you’ve read the book of Exodus or seen the movie *Prince of Egypt*, you know the story. For 400 years, the Jews were slaves in Egypt. Moses was called by God to lead the children of Israel out of bondage. After the deadly Passover experience, Pharaoh allowed the Jews to leave and then he chased them into the desert. The Red Sea parted and the Israelites passed through safely to the other side. When Pharaoh followed, the sea crashed down on them and the enemies of Israel were destroyed.

But that’s only *half* the story, because Moses’ job was not only to lead them *out* of bondage, but to also lead them *into* the Promised Land. Everything was going great—until they came to a place called Kadesh Barnea. Here’s the problem described in Deuteronomy 1:2-3: “It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them.”

Kadesh Barnea was the staging area to enter the Promised Land. It should have only taken 11 days from Mt. Horeb to enter the Promised Land, but did you notice it said, “in the fortieth year?” What happened? You can read about it in Numbers 33. Now, I suspect the Jews were really Baptists, because the first thing they did was to elect a committee to scout out the Promised Land. This twelve-member Holy Land Investigation Committee slipped into Canaan. When they returned, ten committee members said, “Yes, it’s a lush land, but we can’t do it—too many obstacles. It’s gonna cost us too much!” Only two of the committee members, Joshua and Caleb said, “Yes, there are obstacles but God can overcome all the obstacles—Let’s go!” So, like any good Baptist church they held a vote. Moses said, “All in favor of going in now, say ‘Aye.’” Only Joshua and Caleb and a few voices responded, “Aye!” Then Moses said, “All opposed to going in say, ‘Nay.’” Hundreds of thousands of voices answer back “NAY!!!!”

Sadly, the only voice that really mattered was not considered. Do you know what God said when these people gave in to fear? In Deuteronomy 1:34: When the Lord heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore, “Not a man of this evil generation will see the good land I swore to give to your forefathers, except Caleb ... your assistant Joshua, son of Nun will enter it. And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it. But as for you, turn around and set toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.” In Deuteronomy 2:1 Moses observes, “For a long time, we made our way around the hill country of Seir.”

As I have said before, because the children of Israel were not willing to trust God and go forward and claim God’s promise, He basically said, “Take another lap around Mt. Sinai—and another and another.” For forty years that’s what happened. That’s the mistake we must avoid! So here stands Joshua, forty years later, facing the same challenge. But this is the second generation. God told Joshua the same thing He is telling us:

1. We must be strong and courageous to claim the opportunity

For us, Kadesh Barnea is a place where we stand with an opportunity before us. This challenge can only be claimed by faith. At Kadesh Barnea, the Israelites failed to seize the moment and

claim God’s promise; as a result they wandered aimlessly for 40 long years. As members of Green Acres, standing before a great opportunity, we must avoid the attitude of fear and unbelief.

Here we are in 2001. Like Joshua’s generation, we are the second generation of this church. We stand exactly where our church forefathers were 46 years ago. The new building we are about to occupy is built on the exact location of the first facility Green Acres built in 1955. There were 297 people who looked at the opportunity of building a church out on the southern edge of Tyler. It was Kadesh Barnea time. Thank God these people were like Joshua and Caleb. They didn’t turn away from the challenge, they moved forward in faith. I thank God our church hasn’t been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. I have heard wonderful stories of how those first people made sacrificial financial gifts to build the first building. I’ve heard how the bank wouldn’t lend money to a struggling little congregation, so several dozen men each signed their name to a \$1,000 note to borrow the money to build the first building. I wonder how many of that original group of 300 could ever envision a church with 10,000 members that is having a world-wide impact?

Not many of us here today were part of that brave group 46 years ago. Any of you charter members here today? There’s a Joshua, there’s a Caleb! Like our church forefathers, we are just a few weeks away from a new opportunity, a new challenge. God is telling us to be strong and courageous; we must claim the opportunity!

2. He will give us strength and courage to face the opposition

Why did Moses’ generation refuse to claim God’s promise? The answer is found in Numbers 33: 27, 33 “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful ... All the people we saw are of great size ... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes.”

Instead of seeing the opportunity, they saw the opposition—and they backed away. Instead of saying, “Look how BIG our God is,” they cried, “Look how big those giants are!” They were suffering from a “grasshopper complex.” They weren’t grasshoppers in the eyes of their enemies; they were grasshoppers in their *own* eyes. When a church gets a “grasshopper complex,” the members look at opportunity and all they see is the opposition. So they just hop off in the opposite direction. And we will face plenty of opposition in the days to come. It’s not a time for grasshoppers. There have been critics over the past three years who have scoffed and mocked us for what we are doing. You’ve heard this building called everything from the Green Acres Stadium, to the Dykes Dome, to Six Flags over Jesus. There are those out there who say it is tragic we are spending so much money on such a facility. There are even those within our own church who are griping and complaining about it.

(That’s why Judas criticized Mary when she poured out the expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus. Judas said the money could have been used to feed the poor. Jesus said, “She has done a good thing.”)

There will be opposition but we must remember our battle is not against flesh and blood: it is spiritual warfare. In the next few months, I promise Satan will do everything in his power to try

to divide us, distract us, and disrupt our unity. While we’ve been busy with Discover the Joy, Satan has been conducting Destroy the Joy. These next four weeks, while I’m preaching on Share the Joy, our adversary will be conducting a parallel campaign called Spoil the Joy!

There is going to be opposition but I’m not afraid. Because “Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:4) I may think I’m a grasshopper before the devil but my God is able to deliver me! I’m not looking at the grasshopper in me; I’m looking at the God who reigns!

II. THE MISSION WE MUST ACCOMPLISH

Rather than look at the opposition, let’s look at the opportunity. God has a mission for us. It’s the same mission God had for His people in the Old Testament. We must understand:

1. God’s purpose: Blessed to be a blessing

Thousands of years ago, God promised that Abraham would be the Father of a mighty nation and they would have their own homeland. In Genesis 12:1-3: The Lord said to Abram, “Leave your country, ... and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing ... and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Even to this day, Israel still wants to claim the first part of that promise without having to fulfill the second part. Tomorrow’s newspaper will report Israel is fighting for control of Israel, wanting to relocate the capital back to Jerusalem. Why? Partly because of the promise God made to Abraham. But Abraham’s descendants forgot the part about *being* a blessing; they just wanted to *receive* a blessing. From the start, God intended Israel to be a nation that would be a blessing to those who did not yet know Him. Israel became selfish and exclusive. God’s chosen people became proud and self-centered and hugged themselves to death.

Green Acres, we must remember God did not place us here not be a blessing receptacle but to be a channel of blessings to others! Just as God wanted to bless the nations of the world through Israel, He wants to bless our community, our state, our nation, and our world through Green Acres. I’ll more to say about that at the end of this message.

That’s what God wants us to do. Now how does He want us to do it?

2. God’s plan: Obey and share His Word

God’s formula for success hasn’t changed over the past 3,400 years. God says, “Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you will be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” How do you define success? Ask in the business world and you’ll get a different answer than you will in the sporting world or in the political world. Here’s God’s definition: Knowing and doing the Will of God. You find God’s Will in His Word.

Our strategy for being a blessing to those around us is to honor, obey, and proclaim the word of God. God said it must be in our mouths (proclaimed); He says it must be meditated upon (in our minds); and it must be obeyed (in our hearts). God has blessed us through the years because we

have been a Bible church. That means that the *only* doctrine we hold is the teaching of the Bible. We don’t have any creeds or codes or confessions. We have only the Bible as our basis of authority. That’s why the first thing I say when I walk into the pulpit Sunday after Sunday is, “Open your Bibles, please...”

A couple of years ago, I took one of my old preaching Bibles and wrapped it in plastic and then lowered it with a rope to the bottom of a deep hole that would form a pier for the foundation of this new facility. It was the pier closest to where the pulpit is located. The reason we did it was to symbolically say we want to be a church built on the Word of God. Now the church isn’t a building—it’s people. But we can say the same thing. We desire to be a congregation of people whose lives are built upon the Word of God. There is a mistake we must avoid, spiritual cowardice at Kadesh Barnea. There is a mission we must accomplish: God wants us to *be* a blessing by living and proclaiming His Word. Notice one more way we are like Joshua’s generation:

III. THE MIRACLES WE MUST ANTICIPATE

The key verse for the entire book is found in Joshua 3:5. This verse is going to be the theme verse for Share the Joy. I want us to memorize it this month. Joshua told the people, “Consecrate [sanctify, purify] yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.” There are two parts to that verse: There’s something for us to do, then there’s something God will do.

1. When we clean up our lives

Our job is to consecrate ourselves. That word is also translated, “sanctify” or “purify.” Not only had God prepared a promised land for His people, His people had to be prepared to enter that Promised Land. As you’ve heard me say many times, the main question is *not* “When will the church building be ready?” The pressing question is “When will the church be ready for the building?” That’s why I have asked you to spend the 40 days from March 27 to May 6 in prayer and fasting.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline always accompanied by prayer. You may pray without fasting, but you never fast without praying. I’m not asking you to spend the entire 40 days in prayer and fasting, but you want to consider taking one day a week and refrain from eating from sundown to sundown the next day. Or you may want to fast by giving up meat, or some other food. There are many ways to fast. The value of fasting is that it intensifies your prayer time. If you are going without food on Mondays, when lunchtime rolls around your stomach will say, “Hey! Feed me.” When you say, “No, not today” you are reminded of *why* it is you aren’t eating—you are praying for yourself and our church as we occupy this new building. I’ll be speaking much more in future messages about our spiritual preparation. The second part of Joshua 3:5 says:

2. God will do amazing things among us

Joshua’s job was to tell God’s people. Get ready! Prepare yourselves, sanctify yourselves and you will see God do amazing things. God made the walls of cities fall and He gave them victory against stronger armies; basically He showed Himself to be strong on their behalf. My job is to

tell you the same thing today. Prepare your hearts, sanctify yourselves and we will see God do amazing things among us. Here are some of the miracles I believe we can anticipate:

(a) His awesome presence—worship Him!

God gives this word to Joshua in verse 5, “I will be with you; I will never leave you.” From the first Sunday we gather to worship in the new building, I believe we are going to sense the awesome presence of the Lord in a more powerful way than we ever have before. What’s the difference? It’s the same Lord, and we will be singing the same songs and studying the same Word—none of that will change. But what I believe will change is our ability to magnify the Lord. The word “magnify” means to “make larger.” God won’t get any “bigger,” what will get bigger is our ability to worship Him. Trust me, you will be amazed when you hear a choir of 300 lift up their voices and when you hear a congregation of 3,000 people singing praises to Jesus. Mike and I were going through the plans for the first worship service this week. The theme of that service is going to be “The name of Jesus.” I got so excited just talking about it I shouted! On that morning, I’ll probably just clear off a space and pitch a holy fit!!! Get ready for the Shekinah glory of God to be revealed.

(b) His financial provision—sacrifice unto Him!

A miracle is when so humanly impossible happens, everyone acknowledges only God could do it. We have already seen several financial miracles over the past three years.

Now, I really don’t have much to do with money in our church, I leave that to our experts but I need to talk about money in order to brag on what God has done through you. Exactly three years ago, we were in a spiritual emphasis called “Discover the Joy” (DTJ). We were asking every member of our church to listen to God and obey Him by making a real sacrifice to give over a three-year period to pay for a portion of our construction costs. Our consultant, Resource Services Inc., told us for a church with our budget, the most we could expect to pledge was about \$9-\$11 million. But God got hold of people’s hearts and we saw a miracle of sacrifice. People started donating stocks, real estate, wedding rings, Rolex watches, antiques, boats, cars, trucks—and cash. When all the gifts and pledges were totaled in March 1998, it came to \$19.1 million. At that time, it was the third largest amount given and pledged by any church in America of any denomination—right here in little Tyler, Texas! That was miracle number one.

Here’s miracle number two: Another rule of thumb is of the amount that is “pledged” only about 92% will actually be given. But instead of actually receiving *less* than the \$19 million pledged, we have already received *more* than \$21 million. The folks at RSI are scratching their heads—they’ve never seen a church like Green Acres.

Here’s miracle number three: Before the project started, our church negotiated a very good interest rate with Bank of America to borrow the money we need to complete the project. It consists of a line of credit to be used during the construction phase that will convert to a fixed 15-year note this July. Based upon giving estimates and construction costs, we expected to start borrowing money in November of 1999—but you kept giving ahead of schedule and we passed that date and then went all the way through 2000 without having to borrow a penny. Each month

the Bank of America folks pull out the contract and dust it off, only to put it back in the file. We’ve come close several times. For instance during the last few days of 2000, Everett Brazeal told me the construction bills were something like \$835 more than the money we had in Discover the Joy. I know I’ll lose my reward in heaven for telling you this but I made an extra Discover the Joy offering of \$835 so he could pay the December construction bills.

Then in January, we got an additional \$1 million gift and your giving has been so great we have been able to pay cash so far this year. Where are we now? Well, frankly, we are out of money again. In March our construction bills were more than the cash we had on hand in Discover the Joy. So we borrowed money but not from Bank of America. Our Finance Committee wisely borrowed the money from other GABC accounts to save us at least one month’s interest. That’s called borrowing from Peter to pay Paul—but we have to pay Peter back.

But I stand here today exactly three years from the start of Discover the Joy and can tell you we still haven’t borrowed one thin dime from the bank—yet. Here’s the bottom line: The project cost \$26.4 million, and we still owe around \$5 million. Now, if we have to go to Bank of America this month and access our line of credit, God has already performed three financial miracles. But I wonder: Does God have another miracle in store for us?

Discover the Joy officially concludes at the end of this month. Thank you for your three-year commitments. Now, I’m asking you now to consider being a part of Share the Joy. On Dedication Day, May 6, I am asking you to join me in making a one-time dedication gift that day. What can you give on that day that will give God the greatest honor and glory? In addition, I am going to extend my monthly giving to Share the Joy for an additional 12 months. I’m asking you to pray about doing the same thing.

Here’s the final miracle, and it gets me most excited:

c. His needy people—welcome them!

I am convinced that over the next two months, God is going to bring thousands of new people in through the doors of our church. Some are just curious and that’s great. Hundreds of people followed Jesus out of curiosity and many of them were redeemed as a result. Everyone who comes to our church needs something: forgiveness. It’s our job to be ready to welcome them and to share Jesus with them. Remember a few minutes ago I spoke about how we are blessed to be a blessing? Now is the time for you to get out your asbestos shield because I need to bare my soul to you and speak plainly. (We aren’t on television today, which is good, because this is just for the family).

Part of our preparation for entering this new building is to be ready for the new people God is going to send. For God to bless us, we are going to have to take a new attitude into this new facility.

Sometimes church members get all hot and bothered about things like music styles, drama or non-traditional approaches to reaching people. I believe that attitude stems from the belief the church exists to be a blessing to them and anything that doesn’t bless them must be wrong. Pardon

me in advance for offending some of you but every ounce of my being believes our church exists not for those of us who are already saved but to be a blessing to those who haven't entered into a personal relationship with God yet. Jesus said He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. I've said it before but our church is not a showcase for saints—we are a hospital for sinners.

But do we really act that way? How do we treat those who aren't like us? For instance, when we have Randy Travis in concert on Monday night, May 7, it won't be your typical Sunday morning crowd—and thank God for that! On the first few Sundays there will be hundreds of curiosity seekers. How are we going to treat these folks? By saying, “Hey, this is MY pew?” And you don't even have a pew, yet I expect some of you will show up at sunrise on the first Sunday to stake your claim!

A lot of these newcomers are going to look different than we do. They may be a different race or culture; they may have tattoos and not be wearing Armani or Gucci. But they are people who need to be clothed in the forgiveness and righteousness of Jesus.

People ask me if I'm excited about the building. My honest answer is this, “I'm not excited about the building itself. I am excited about the thousands of people who are going to encounter Jesus in our new building.” As these new people come, we must remember every single person in our region is a person who is deeply cherished and loved by God. Jesus loves each one of them with a passionate, cleansing love and if we are going to call ourselves the Body of Christ, we must welcome them and love them for Jesus' sake. So, I'm asking some of us hardheaded folks like me to be willing to take a new attitude into the new facility. Here's the attitude; it's a Bible attitude. Paul said, “I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means, I might save some.” (1 Corinthians 9:22) Will you repeat it after me? **WHATEVER IT TAKES TO REACH PEOPLE; I'M WILLING, LORD!**

I know thousands are going to come because of what Jesus said in John 12:32. Jesus said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” Listen, we are simply building a bigger platform from which we can lift Jesus higher and we are going to be amazed at the people He will draw to Himself!

When all this is said and done, I don't want people to say, “Look what those folks at Green Acres did.” I want people to stand in awe and say, “Look what God is doing!”

OUTLINE

I. THE MISTAKE WE MUST AVOID

(It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road.) In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the LORD had commanded him concerning them. *Deuteronomy 1:2-3*

We must be strong and courageous to:

1. Claim the opportunity
2. Face the opposition

“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, ... All the people we saw are of great size ... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, ... ” *Numbers 13:27-33*

II. THE MISSION WE MUST ACCOMPLISH

1. God’s purpose: Blessed to be a blessing
2. God’s plan: obey and share His Word

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, ... and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing ... and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” *Genesis 12:1-3*

III. MIRACLES WE MUST ANTICIPATE

Joshua told the people, “Consecrate [sanctify, purify] yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.” *Joshua 3:5*

1. When we clean up our lives,
2. God will do amazing things among us:

His awesome presence—worship Him!
His financial provision—sacrifice unto Him!
His needy people—welcome them!

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes