

I always enjoy hearing the stories of people who the world regards as accomplishing great things, because usually those people had some challenges – oftentimes significant challenges – to overcome. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. Thomas Edison was told when he was young that he was “too stupid” to accomplish anything. He probably had ADHD, though it wasn't something that was diagnosed as such back then. In reflection, Edison said that his success was 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. Stories like that make me realize that if they can achieve what they did, then God can use me in significant ways to achieve stuff for him.

But, it's not just hard work that gets a lot of people like this to their places of greatness. **What makes them great is that they realized life is too short to play it safe.** The hard work is driven by a vision of how things could be different and better than they currently are. They didn't get comfortable with who people said they were, or with their circumstances, or their situation.

Look at this **photo** of me – is that the picture of someone ready to step out and take some risks for God? Is this someone who wants to change his circumstance or situation and make life for himself or others better? Absolutely not. Who would want to change *that*? And it's hard to tell in this photo...but I'm literally floating on an inflatable *sloth*. Think about *that* for a moment.



Gwen bought this floaty just before we went on vacation, not realizing what I was preaching on this morning. Nothing in this photo says “risk” – it's all comfort and safety and status quo. And much the same in life, in our journey of faith, in our life together as a church: when we get comfortable, when we play it safe, *nothing really happens*. **And “nothing happening” is dangerous to our faith and faithfulness to God; it's the opposite of how God operates.** God rarely moves in powerful ways in our lives, when we're on a sloth floaty. God might inspire there...he might give us a vision for the future that could be...we need quiet times and down times...but then we

need to get off the sloth floaty and step out in faith and trust, getting out of our comfort zones.

Scripture gives us a number of people who realized that playing it safe, and hanging out on a floaty in the seas of life wasn't what God was calling them to do. So, they stepped out in faith and took risks for God. We might think of Moses, Rahab, Daniel, Peter, Paul and Mary...literally, Peter, Paul, and Mary...not the musical group, plus others. Sometimes, the risks were quite large, to the point of foolishness in the eyes of the world. But, whether large or small, they trusted in God and his faithfulness and got off of the sloth float. We're looking at one of those people today, in **Joshua 1:1-18**.

Sermon Title Slide. Pray. So, Joshua recognized the need to step out and trust God. Joshua realized, by the prompting of God, that getting comfortable and doing nothing, was dangerous. Joshua followed in the footsteps of Moses, arguably the greatest leader ever of Israel. Joshua had some big shoes to fill. He was second in command to Moses for the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert. So, for 40 years Joshua was groomed and trained to take over as the leader...and then he did, continuing what Moses had started. And God wastes no time in prompting Joshua to move things forward. God says to him, **“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 to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.” (Joshua 1:2-3).**

There's no resting on their laurels and getting comfortable with where they are on their sloth floaties. God has made a promise to them, and He's going to keep it, but it means getting up and moving forward. But this isn't a natural thing for Joshua, because three times God tells him to “be strong and courageous.” And the people exhort him to be strong and courageous a fourth time. God is giving Joshua a bit of a pep-talk here. “You can do this,” God is saying. But it's not like God sends him out on his own. **God reminds him, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (Joshua 1:5).**

And that's not a hollow promise. In the 40 years that Joshua spent as the aid to Moses, undoubtedly Moses shared with him the promises of God and God's fulfillment of them. Remember when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush in Exodus 3? God wanted to send Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. And perhaps you remember that Moses responded by saying, "YES God! I have always wanted to do this!" Actually, that's not how it happened. Moses gave excuse after excuse about why God was picking the wrong person. And after every excuse, God says, "I will be with you." God is the one who will do this, and God will make it happen, even as he works through Moses. And sure enough...God worked through Moses exactly as he said he would and God fulfilled his promise to Moses and was with him every step of the way.

And almost certainly Moses shared all of that with Joshua (and much of it – like in the 40 years as Moses' understudy) Joshua saw, as well). So, when God tells Joshua, "It's time for you to lead these people forward...*I will be with you...*" Joshua does it! He doesn't try to play it safe and put up excuse after excuse...he doesn't say, "but we like wandering in the desert...we want to keep doing that...it's comfortable." He gets things going, because he knows he can trust God.

Now, God gives him some requirements in order for him to be successful. There are three conditions that Joshua has to follow in order for success to happen: 1) Obey God, 2) Study Scripture, and 3) Be strong and courageous. In verses 7 and 8 God tells him, "**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. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful (Joshua 1:7-8).**" The law is simply another way to speak of Scripture, God's Word to humankind. God is telling him, "Know it and live by it." When we do that, we obey God, because God's instructions for life are in it. That's what God is telling him to do. And he tells him to be strong and courageous. "Have no fear, because I am with you," is what God is saying.

If Joshua does these three things, then he will prosper and be successful. And it's not a narcissistic, selfish prosperity and success. God wants Joshua and the Israelites to trust Him for more than that. God wants you and me to trust him for more than selfish success and prosperity. God isn't in the business of selfish success. Scripture tells us that God is in the business of transforming us into his image...to be more like him and his character. We are, after all, created in the image of God. So, God is in the business of helping us to and leading us – through knowing and obeying him and his word – to be all about Him and His Kingdom. And God is in the business of serving others. God is in the business of meeting the needs of those who are hurt. God is in the business of comforting those who mourn. God is in the business healing broken bodies, minds, spirits, and relationships. God is in the business of delivering us from our sin. Put succinctly: **Joshua's “success and prosperity” isn't primarily for his benefit or for the people he's leading: It's for the glory of God and His Kingdom.** Just the same: our prosperity and our success isn't for us: It's for the glory of God and His Kingdom. We, too, are only successful and prosperous when what we do brings glory and honor to God.

And we don't bring glory and honor to God when we play it safe. Godly success and prosperity never come from playing it safe. Joshua brought glory to God by Leading his people forward, not resting where they were, in their comfort zone.

Now, everyone's sense of “comfort zone” and “risk” is different. There is a story about a monastery that once existed in Europe perched high on a cliff several hundred feet in the air. The only way to reach the monastery was to be suspended in a basket which was pulled to the top by several monks who pulled and tugged with all their strength. Obviously, the ride up the steep cliff in that basket was comfort-zone stretching for some. A visitor got exceedingly nervous one time about half-way up as he noticed that the rope by which he was suspended was old and frayed. With a trembling voice he asked the monk who was riding with him in the basket how often they changed the rope. The monk thought for a moment and answered brusquely, “Whenever it breaks.” The visitor in that story did not like the risk level, while the monk apparently felt fine. So, we all have different levels of

comfort and risk, and how we each live out our faith, therefore, will look different.

But every Biblical story of success, every story of prosperity for God, is a story of taking a risk, of getting a little uncomfortable, of getting up out of the sloth floaty of life. David battled Goliath; Daniel wouldn't pray the comfortable prayer to the King; Rahab hid the Jewish spies in her house; Jesus Christ left his throne in heaven to become a human and then was crucified on a cross. In all of those, God was with them and vindicated them: David killed Goliath and went on to be King of Israel; Daniel was kept alive in the Lion's den and came out praising God; Rahab was brought to safety with the Jews when they conquered Jericho; Jesus Christ was resurrected on the third day. There are countless other stories of people refusing to play it safe and instead taking risks for the glory of God. Those are the stories of prosperity and success for God that inspire us to greater faith. And they're all about people who were strong and courageous and refused to play it safe for God. **No one was ever successful or prosperous for God by sitting back comfortably in the sloth floaty of life.**

Perhaps especially, Jesus didn't. He lived, died, and rose from the grave, so that the world would be changed for eternity. Do you suppose he felt like he was playing it safe when he left his throne in heaven to come to earth? How about when he hung on the cross and the sins of humanity came upon him? In the garden of Gethsemane, just before he was crucified, he prayed, "Father, take this cup from me. But not my will, but yours be done" (Matthew 26:39). That's the prayer of a person who's about to get out of his floaty in a big way.

But like Joshua, his primary concern is to do the will of God, of his heavenly father. And His Father's will was to transform the world through his amazing love and forgiveness in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And: **If the world is going to continue to be transformed by his love, then the people who love Jesus Christ can't play it safe, either.** You and I bring glory to Jesus Christ when we decide that life is too short to play it safe, get up off our sloth floaties, and live for God with strength and courage in a way that is faithful to God's word and to who God is, and trusts him to lead us and carry us through.

No other entity on the face of the earth offers the hope that the church has to offer. No other organization, certainly no government, no educational system, no non-profit organization...nothing on earth has the power to lead people toward Jesus as Savior and Lord except the church – which is people like you and me who follow Jesus. That is the ultimate transformation that can take place, and you and I are the ones charged with carrying that out.

This is what the vision of our church is all about. **Our vision at Rose Hill is to lead people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play.** It's a true-to-Scripture vision that inspires us to get out of our comfort zones and live out our faith in all facets of life, each and every day. Living out our faith on Sunday mornings is comfortable. Well...maybe with our change to one service it's gotten a little less comfortable...but it's still a place and a time of spiritual safety. There are no risks for confessing your faith in Jesus here, that's for sure! Many of us have done that for years and decades. We're used to it. Sunday church fits us like a glove. But sometimes we leave our faith at the church, or during the week we keep it confined to our personal devotion and prayer time or a small group we meet with once or twice a month. That's not what God is calling us to, because it's not strong and courageous.

Like the Israelites crossing the Jordan into the land that God promised them, the vision for our church is an invitation to be strong and courageous, not necessarily comfortable, and put our faith on the line a little bit more; To live it out and be a little bolder in our allegiance to Jesus. We're not putting ourselves in any baskets held by a fraying rope...but the sloth floaty isn't where God is leading us, either. Just as Joshua and the Israelites were faithful to God; just as Christians throughout the centuries, including here at Rose Hill, have stepped out in faith and trust to be strong and courageous for Jesus: we are continuing the tradition of God's people and of Rose Hill to be faithful to God's calling. And just like them, we're moving forward in strength and courage with the Lord right with us, so that we will bring success and prosperity, glory and honor to Him.

Have you been a little too comfortable in your faith and in your life? Is the floaty of life getting worn out from too much use? Pray that God would

open your eyes to new ways for you to serve God, to worship him, to experience his “never leaving or forsaking” presence with you...and to proclaim that and share it with others in everyday conversations...to give God credit and glory outside of Sunday mornings. Meditate on God’s word...know it...speak it...don’t turn to the right or to the left from it, and then pray that God would make you “strong and courageous” to follow him and live out what he is doing in your life and in our church...and take that into the world each day: because when it comes to leading people toward Jesus, life is too short to play it safe. Let's pray...Amen.