Message Notes

I. The Historical Background to Today’s Scriptures:

II. The Overarching Message of Today’s Scriptures:

III. What Do These Scriptures Tell Me About God?

IV. What Do These Scriptures Mean for Me?

Learning from the Rabbi

Sermon Scripture Passage:

Holy Space

Joshua led the people into the Promised Land with the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the Ark were the tablets of the Ten Commandments Moses received from God. The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God’s presence and power. Before the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, the Levites (tribe of priests) carried the Ark of the Covenant as they marched around the city of Jericho in silence for six days (Joshua 6). This week set apart a time and a space free of distractions to focus of God. Sit in silence for two minutes before beginning the meditation moments for the day. Experience the presence of God in your holy space.
Joshua 3:9-17

So Joshua told the Israelites, “Come and listen to what the Lord your God says. Today you will know that the living God is among you....

“Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River! Now choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. The priests will carry the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall.”

So the people left their camp to cross the Jordan, and the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river’s edge, the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the town of Jericho.

Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by. They waited there until the whole nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

VIDEO Blowing of the Shofar

SLIDE Joshua and Gideon

For many people, faith is a mystical, elusive concept. Having faith seems like nailing Jell-O to the wall! It’s constantly moving and often hard to get a handle on. In many ways Joshua gives us a good description of actual faith so we are going to look more closely at that together.

Today we continue in a series of sermons that is taking us on a journey through the Old Testament. The last few weeks we have looked at an overview of the Hebrew Bible as well as the first five books also known as the books of the Law or the Pentateuch. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy take us from the beginning of creation and humanity and narrow it down to one
particular group of people, the Hebrew people, and their covenantal relationship with God.

Two weeks ago we focused on Abraham and Sarah and what we learn from them because their family is the foundation of the rest of the Old Testament. Last week we looked at Moses as he took the people on a journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom, even though it meant wandering in the wilderness for the next 40 years.

We ended last week's sermon with Moses here, at the top of Mount Nebo.

**SLIDE Mount Nebo**

This is where Moses died and leadership of the Israelites is left to Joshua, Son of Nun. If you have not done so already, please take out of your bulletin this insert which has a map of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. You will need to use that to take notes this week because it was Spring Break this past week and your pastor did not get an outline done, nor did he give you a study guide. That means this week we hope you will use this devotion guide for Lent that the ushers can give you as you leave today to do some special study time on your own each day this week.

**SLIDE Kingdoms of Israel and Judah**

Mount Nebo is located on the east side of the Dead Sea in this region of Moab. It was from here that Joshua lead the people into the Promised Land which would become the territories of Judah and Israel. The first half of the book of Joshua begins in 1250 BC.

In Joshua 3, the children of Israel are faced with a really unprecedented challenge. They’ve been wandering for 40 years. Forty years ago was 1970 and the United States invaded Cambodia. Also that year the Ohio National Guard opened fire on protesting students at Kent State University where four students were killed and nine were wounded. The Beatles disbanded early in 1970 and John Lennon and Yoko Ono were married. Anwar Sadat became President of Egypt.

Those of you who remember back then, realize how much has transpired in those forty years. Picture yourselves wandering in a wilderness for that same amount of time.
Now they’re standing on the east bank of the Jordan River. They have had victory among the Ammonites and others on this east side, and they’re prepared to cross. There are a couple of issues that they need to face. Not only are there Amorites across the river, and a bunch of other "ites" that Joshua lists for us in the third chapter. Let’s also not forget that the river is at flood stage, and you don’t just walk across the Jordan River at flood stage.

SLIDE MAP the Kingdom of David and Solomon

It is from this place that Joshua leads the people from the wilderness returning to the home of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the first part of Joshua the Israelites cross the Jordan River on dry ground and set up camp near the mighty city of Jericho. God commanded the people to conquer Jericho by marching around the city 13 times, blowing trumpets, and shouting. They went on to possess most of the land of Canaan over the next 30 years. Part two of the book of Joshua records the assignment and settlement of the territory in the Promised Land. The book concludes with Joshua’s farewell address and his death.

SLIDE Judges

The next historical book is Judges. Judges is a book about heroes—12 men and women who delivered Israel from its oppressors for a 200 year period from approximately 1220 to 1050 BC. The judges were not perfect; in fact they included an assassin, a sexually promiscuous man, and a person who broke all the laws of hospitality. But they were willing to obey God and God used them.

Judges is a book about sin and its consequences. Like a minor cut or abrasion that becomes infected when left untreated, then grows and soon poisons the whole body. The book of Joshua ends with the nation taking a stand for God, ready to experience all the blessings of the Promised Land. After settling in Canaan, however, the Israelites lost their spiritual commitment and motivation. When Joshua and the elders died, the nation experienced a leadership vacuum, leaving them without a strong central government. Instead of enjoying freedom and prosperity in the Promised Land, Israel entered the dark ages of her history.

Simply stated, the reason for this rapid decline was sin which was both individual and corporate. The first step away from God was incomplete obedience. The Israelites refused to follow God’s commandments and instructions fully. Eventually, they forgot about God and they began to commit idolatry as they adopted customs from cultures around them. Before long the
Israelites became captives. They became desperate again and begged God to rescue them. Since God had a covenant with the Israelites he kept his promise by raising up judges to deliver his people. These judges were both warriors and leaders and for a time there would be peace. Then complacency and disobedience would set in, and the cycle would begin again.

The book of Judges records six successive periods of oppression and deliverance, and the careers of 12 deliverers. God uses a variety of deliverers—from Othniel to Samson—to lead his people to freedom and true worship. God's deliverance through the Judges is a powerful demonstration of his love and mercy toward his people.

**SLIDE** What do we learn from Joshua and Judges?

Would you agree with me that challenges come in life? Each one of us sitting here today could name a challenge that we’re facing. It’s the nature of life. It could be anything from an issue with relationships in a family, in a marriage, at work, at school; perhaps it’s a serious crisis, maybe involving money or health; maybe involving something that keeps us awake at night.

The Bible tells us that in the midst of these challenges you need to have faith. You’ve got a challenge -- face it by faith, and God’s people say, "Amen!"

But God’s people don’t all agree on what exactly faith looks like. Face it by faith? What is faith anyway? An astute Christian will point to Hebrews 11:1,

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**SLIDE** 1 Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.

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It’s defined for us right there in Hebrews, but what exactly does that mean? And how does that help me with my crisis or struggles or challenges in life? Maybe faith is like this scene from one of my daughter's favorite movies:

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**VIDEO** BOLT

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**SLIDE** Gideon 1162-1122 B.C. – Judges 6-8

I like what the Bible says about faith through Gideon’s story. Israel is being ruled over and oppressed by the Midianites who were cruel. They were in one of their down cycles of not following God and because of that they were struggling. They cried out to God and God responded by raising up Gideon. Listen to what happens as the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon in Judges, chapter 6 beginning in verse 11 and following.
Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, “Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!”

“Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The Lord brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.”

Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”

“But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!”

The Lord said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.”

Gideon replied, “If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. Don’t go away until I come back and bring my offering to you.”

He answered, “I will stay here until you return.”

Think back to Abraham and Moses. Are you beginning to see a pattern of who God chooses to lead? Gideon was of the weakest clan and he knew it. Not only that, he was the weakest in his entire family, yet God chose him. God not only chose him but said the powerful words, "I will be with you."

Joshua and Gideon

Here is what I want you to notice about the stories of Joshua and Gideon. God uses all kinds of people to fulfill his work in the world. Joshua is the kind of person that when God says, "Jump."

Joshua says, "How high?"

He is just willing to do whatever God wants him to do. He was the eternal optimist when it came to believing in God. Joshua was one of the spies that Moses sent into the Promised Land those 40 years before they began wandering...
the desert. Joshua came back and said, "We can take them because God is on our side."

All of the other spies said it looked bleak. All of the other spies whined to Moses about being brought in the wilderness to die. All of the other spies wanted to go back to Egypt and be slaves again. But not Joshua—Joshua had this internal ability to not only trust God but to know in his heart that God would be faithful.

Then there is Gideon who is the Old Testament version of doubting Thomas. He is meant to remind us of Moses because he doesn't think he can really do this task and he gives God all kinds of excuses. Even asks God to give him a sign, not just once, but three times!

Yet God was patient with Gideon and used him to be one of the most successful Judges and rulers of Israel. He feared his own limitations would prevent God from working through him and if you read his story you will find that he was very human and made many mistakes as a leader.

As we read the stories of Joshua and Gideon we do find several common themes running through their lives that would be good for us to remember in our lives today.

SLIDE Biblical faith always begins with God’s Word.
Romans 10:17 put it this way.

SLIDE "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

Faith always begins with God’s Word, and here is where we need to be careful that we are not fooled. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism said, "Scripture contains everything necessary for salvation." Faith always rests on truth that begins with God, not on someone’s feelings or someone’s impressions, or somebody’s report of super-spiritual or ethereal thing that happens.

I remember when I was in college and I used to sit outside the student union in the springtime, about this time of year, to catch a glimpse of Rev. Jed. Rev. Jed was a self proclaimed "prophet" who would preach fire and damnation to all of us heathen college students. I remember a young man getting into a shouting match with Rev. Jed over what he was going to do after college. The young man said he was going to be a psychologist and Rev. Jed got in his face and warned and scolded him, saying, "God has told me that if you choose this course
of action you will be just like a fornicator because today's fornicator's are tomorrow's psychology professors! God will not be with you in this son!"

My first reaction was to laugh but I also remembered that the Bible says, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Beware of any so-called faith that doesn't begin with and rest upon the clear truth of God’s Word as revealed in Jesus Christ.

In Joshua’s situation, God’s Word, of course, began with the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God spoke clearly to Abraham saying, "From your seed I will raise up a nation and through that nation, I will touch every nation of the earth." This is an amazing promise that was unknown to that point! Abraham clung to God’s Word. Moses clung to God’s Word. God said, "I will always be with you; I will take you into Egypt, Moses, and by your hand I will lead the people out."

Moses hung on to that, and now it’s Joshua’s turn. The LORD told Joshua, "Joshua, don’t ever let the Word of God depart from your mouth. Go where you will across this river, I will be with you. I will give you victory. I will lead you on."

Now Joshua is passing that same word on to the people and to the priests, saying it’s time now, as it were, to get our feet wet. What they needed to know at the moment was that these literally are their marching orders for right now. Do them!

God’s instructions spring from a grand dream that Jesus called the Kingdom of God. The Old Testament refers to it as Paradise which is lost but will one day be restored by God. You and I are the workers towards that paradise. The kingdom of God is what God is doing in the big picture. We can’t always see the big picture clearly but we as Christians are called to play our part in the project, wherever God has put us. It’s not our plan; it’s God’s plan.

SLIDE Faith always includes God’s presence

The second truth we see in the stories of Joshua and Gideon is that faith always includes God’s caring Presence. Hebrews 13:5 says it in the strongest terms possible.

SLIDE 5 Don’t love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.”

That’s quite the promise. Can any earthly soul make a claim like that? No. It’s almost beyond our ability to fathom. This promise was made to Joshua and to Gideon a thousand years before Christ and God makes this promise to us today.
Moses experienced this presence and recognized that God was with him and Joshua was his protégé. Before Joshua, Moses was the main man and he had been for years. Moses was the prophet of Israel par excellence; he set the high water mark. He was the author of the first five books of the Bible. The point of reference to which every future prophet would refer, was back to Moses. Moses had big shoes and God called Joshua to fill them. It’s one thing for God to make that appointment; it’s another thing for the people to recognize and honor it, so God is setting Joshua up here. He says this in Joshua 3:7:

**SLIDE 7** The Lord told Joshua, “Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites. They will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses.”

Do you remember that Moses parted the Red Sea? Do you see what’s happening here? When Moses was the main man, God parted the Red Sea and they got away from the Egyptians. What’s very interesting is that Moses held in his hand the staff of God which was Moses’ rod. It was something that the people needed to see. Remember, he held it aloft and the Red Sea parted.

Now Joshua is the main man, and we part the Jordan River. The people needed to see that. Things have changed just a little bit. Joshua doesn’t have the staff; that was Moses’. Now the Presence of God is no longer represented by a man with a staff; now God’s Presence is represented by the Ark of the Covenant.

Their theology has come a ways; they have manna to remember, they have a written word to remember, they have Aaron’s rod that budded, and those things all go into the ark. The ark is that gold plated little box that’s carried on poles and has a couple angels on top.

What does the ark represent? Always and ever, the Ark of God, (not Noah’s ark), the little box, the ark of God always represents the Presence of God. Does God live in a little box? No! And He didn’t live in a big temple either, like the one they built in Jerusalem. Not even the highest heavens, the Psalmist said, can contain God.

If heaven is God’s throne, the earth is merely God’s footstool. You can’t put God in a physical structure and keep him there, but because we’re people, we need to see something that represents the Presence of God.

The Ark of God in Joshua chapter 3, is mentioned nine times. It is the centerpiece for the people. God’s instruction was that the Ark is to precede the
people out into the river. Why? On the one hand, it separates the people; it makes them know for sure that it isn’t them, it’s God. And secondly, it puts the ark in a place of visibility for everyone, sitting out there where all will file past, and all will understand that it’s the presence of God that makes the difference.

Remember, 38 years prior they had decided not to enter the land when they were at Kadesh Barnea. The spies went out and came back. It was ten against two and the people said, "No, we can’t go in there." God said, "Fine, then get out in to the wilderness for a few decades."

"Oh, no, no, we’ll go." And God said, "I won’t go with you."

"Oh, but we’ll go." Remember -- they went in and the Amalekites whipped them and sent them out, because the Presence of God wasn’t with them.

There are many of them who were still alive, who were young people during that event, and now they’re ready to go into the land, and they needed to understand, graphically and objectively, that the Presence of God is there first. If God is there, victory is sure.

Sometimes we fathom God this way, that God is just kind of out there, and that God will basically kind of tell us sort of what he wants, while we do what we want and hopefully it will all work out. We sometimes conceive that God is distant; we’re wrong in thinking that way. We particularly like it that way when we have in mind doing something we know is not right.

God didn’t just turn the people loose. God’s Presence was visibly and graphically in front of them the whole way. They couldn’t get away from it; they wouldn’t have wanted to.

We see this in Gideon’s story in a powerful and funny way. God trims back Gideon’s army from 30,000 to 300 and they are going to take on thousands of Midianites. But God wanted the people to know that it was God who was with then and brought them victory and not themselves.

Sometimes we think that Jesus was maybe just coming up with a real nice benediction, or being a little bit trite when at the end of Matthew’s gospel, He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." That is the Great Commission. He closes out His benediction with, "And lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
That’s true, that’s not just a platitude. God’s Presence truly is with us on into eternity. That’s wonderful news! How can that be? Jesus told his disciples that he would not leave them without a Comforter. It’s another study, perhaps another sermon, but the truth of the matter is that, by the Holy Spirit, **God is always with us.** The Bible says the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

We don’t need the temple any longer. The body of the believer is the temple now of the Holy Spirit. We can’t get away from God even if we wanted to, and we don’t want to. God **is always with us.** When we are in our moments of joy, **God is with us;** when we are facing struggles, **God is with us;** when we are going through crisis, **God is with us;** when we are making poor choices, **God is with us. God will never leave us; God will never forsake us.** Biblical faith includes the caring Presence of God, always.

**SLIDE**

Faith always involves difficult action—a leap of faith.

II Corinthians 5:7, the apostle Paul put his finger on a principle that we readily forget. Paul said, **“For we live by believing and not by seeing.”**

What does that mean? Faith comes by hearing the Word of God; that means that what God says, takes priority over what we see, or what we feel, or what we think, or what we face. What God has said is most important. Faith always involves difficult action. Why? Because we are so inclined naturally to respond to what we see and what we think and what we feel, and to react to things in a fleshly sort of way, then hope that God is there to help us and bail us out.

What makes this faith business difficult? Remember I said that the idea of faith is simple. By that I mean not complicated, but I would be lying if I said faith is easy. It’s not. Faith involves tough choices, and faith can involve tough consequences. What makes it difficult? It is because we have always had a natural resistance to the things of God. This is part of our human condition we lived over and over again in Joshua and Judges. We really want it our way and not God’s way when we are honest.

This means we have to take action to express and live out our faith in God. In James 2:17-19 we find this out about faith.

**SLIDE**

**17 So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.**
18 Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. 20 How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

Martin Luther said it well,

SLIDE “Faith alone saves, but faith that saves is never alone."

Faith is a gift from God that involves an indwelling Holy Spirit which brings upon us a different heart. When God saves us, God does a work in us that makes us different.

SLIDE 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Paul says this in Ephesians 2:10, God changes us so that we live differently, so that we rise to different challenges, so that we trust God in different arenas, so that God can show strength to us and through us, as we are prepared for eternity with God and with each other. That’s what God’s about in this kingdom business. Now this to me is where the adventure of being a Christian all comes together. If you don’t think of the Christian life as being an adventure, I recommend that you rethink your notion of the Christian life.

The stories of Joshua and Gideon, if they don’t say anything else to us, ought to tell us that God’s people live an adventurous life—if only we will live it by faith. If you are a believer, God is calling you into what Paul said is newness of life. Here’s how it works, here’s the adventure: Trusting God and obeying.

Look at Joshua 3, verses 15 and 16.

SLIDE 15 It was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river’s edge, 16 the water above that point began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point
I love this part of Joshua’s story. When those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped into the edge of the water, then the water stood up. Not when they were 100 feet away, not when they were 10 feet away, but once there was contact between the foot and the wet, and not until, did God come through with deliverance.

They literally stepped out in faith and that’s when God moved. They would still be on the east side of the Jordan if the priests hadn’t put their big dirty toes in the river Jordan. That’s when it happened. Not when they were thinking about crossing, not even when they were praying about crossing, or looking forward to crossing; nothing happened until they got their feet wet.

This is Biblical faith in the present: you put your foot in that water and something is going to happen. When we live by faith, when we look to God and trust, God opens doors. God burdens our hearts and challenges us. God creates opportunities and then we go through a new door that’s opening up. That’s when God does his best work in and through us in amazing ways.

I’ve thought about this in the past when work has been difficult. There have been times I’ve had to make difficult phone calls or have tough conversations and I don’t want to. I don’t like to be uncomfortable. I like everyone to be happy. I don’t like bad feelings that come to the surface, but I have to remember this: God is teaching me something; God is teaching someone else something. This is a faith adventure for the two of us, although it may not be pleasant.

Open the door, say the word, trust God and see what God does in my heart, in the heart of another. Where’s the adventure? Maybe the adventure is with a neighbor; maybe there’s a conviction of the Holy Spirit on your heart that your neighbor may need and invitation to church and to faith. Go there and don’t be afraid to get wet. That’s an adventure that God has put before us. It’s a sphere of influence that God has created for you.

Recently I read about two 80 year old women who went to visit prisoners at the Montana State Prison. They had never done anything like this before. They went behind those walls with razor wire and big old doors that slammed shut to be inside with some mean people, lots of them! With genuine fear and trepidation, these women made their way behind those huge walls and barbed...
wire. One shared her faith story and the other played piano, and they came out different because they trusted God and stepped into an arena where they felt they knew God was leading. God went with them. Their faith was stretched; they knew God a little differently, and they returned to their normal lives a little more willing to risk something for God.

Imagine if we lived an adventure like that where God has placed us. What door will he open in my life today, or in yours? What would happen if I actually read my Bible and prayed six out of seven days this week? What might God do if I took a step of faith like that? What might God do in my heart if I took on a responsibility with the youth or children of this church or at Sunshine Gardens Country Home or went with our group to build a playground in Shiprock, NM—someplace where I’ve not been before?

God says, "I’ll go with you there." "I will use you there." "I’ll be with you there." "I will use you there." "I will bless you there." "I’ll work through you there." What might happen in our lives if we made those phone calls and extended forgiveness and made that apology? What would happen at work if they knew I was a Christian and I actually sought to share my faith? What might God do?

Do you see how the Christian life truly is an adventure when we understand it and if lived by faith? What does God want me to do? Well, maybe I ought to do it. Look at verse 10. When we stick our foot in the water, that’s like present faith, and when we’ve never been this way before, like past faith. Verse 10 is perhaps future faith.

SLIDE 9 So Joshua told the Israelites, “Come and listen to what the Lord your God says. 10 Today you will know that the living God is among you...11 Look, the Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River!

Do you see what God is saying to them? "You put your foot in the water, the water will stand up. Clearly God is proving his Presence to you. God will take you to the other side, and who knows what God will do from there, but God will assuredly keep his promise and go before you."

Faith always involves difficult action, but difficult action is what adventure is made of. And that’s what God calls us to do.

SLIDE Faith results in God’s reward
Hebrews 11:6 says,

**SLIDE** 6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

Faith always results in God’s reward. God always responds to those who seek him by faith and do what God wants. II Chronicles 16:9 is a great verse that is picturesque:

**SLIDE** 9 The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

God is always on the alert for those people who are headed his way, who want to live by faith. What is God’s reward? God’s reward is NOT money or even security.

God’s reward is peace in our hearts, peace with God, peace with one another, joy, calm delight in who God is and what God’s doing; a joy that pervades our lives and draws attention, not to us, but to God because it doesn’t come from us. Unity, everybody agreeing that God’s way is best; victory, freedom from bondage; bondage to sin, bondage to bitterness, bondage to whatever vice may have us in its grip.

Your faith will be little things in this life, these temporary things. God says that you will experience many things in life, great things and difficult things, and these will bring you to the point where you hear, "Well done."

The family of God is saturated with testimonies of people whose lives were a wreck because they chose their own way. The Spirit of God gets a hold of a person, changes a life, changes a marriage, changes a family, changes a situation, and creates a testimony, not to anybody’s wonderfulness, but to **God’s faithfulness and power**, and that’s a reward. Of course, that reward echoes down through the halls of eternity, forever and ever and ever.

**Faith -- we trust God and we obey God and God takes it from there.**

Let's pray.

**SLIDE** Prayer
O God, we give you thanks and praise for the story of Joshua and Gideon and all of the judges. They remind us that it is both a risk and joy to follow you and to trust in you.

God, if we are honest, we have to admit that sometimes we get right down to the water’s edge and we chicken out. We just can’t find the courage to dip our toes in and trust you. Remind us today that you are a forgiving God and you understand our reluctance. Help us today to begin anew and find ways to take that step, whatever it may be, in our lives.

God, give us courage to act and help us to remember that no matter what we face or where we go, that you are with us. Comfort us in this, oh God. Encourage us and give us strength, in Jesus name, amen.