Okotoks Evangelical Free Church

God’s Promise for you

Preparing for the promise

September 11-17, 2016

 Main point

God’s plans are greater than our own, so we must learn to surf the wave of what God is up to.

Thinking Things Through

Connect with each other, but also connect the sermon to the study.

1. Ask members of the group to introduce themselves. Additionally, ask them to share 1 or 2 highlights from their summer. What was the most exciting thing that happened? What was the most disappointing thing that happened?

2. Overall, would you say that your summer went as planned? Better? Worse?

3. When have God’s plans for your life or someone you know proven to be so much greater than what you first thought was possible?

***Leader:*** The longer we live, the more we can come to learn that we’re not in charge of our lives. Things just don’t go as planned as frequently as we’d like. The good news is that there is a sovereign God whose plans are greater than our own. They are superior not only in what they achieve, but in how they achieve it, even if we don’t understand them or if they come at us in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. We’re much better off learning to surf the wave of what God is up to rather than trusting our own plans. The story of Joshua and the city of Jericho illustrates this well.

 Digging deeper

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

>Have a volunteer read Joshua 6:1-5.

4. What would have been especially difficult for Joshua and the Israelites to follow these instructions given what they were facing? Why or why not?

***Leader:*** Jericho was well fortified with outer walls that were six feet thick and inner walls that were fifty feet high. It was an imposing structure. The city’s inhabitants saw the Israelites coming and hunkered down for a fight. This situation made the task of taking the city that much harder for the Israelites, yet not for their God. The statement in 6:1 shows a great potential obstacle that is effortlessly overcome by the all-powerful God. God’s instructions to Joshua about the taking of Jericho contain no reference to military strategy but rather indicate that it is essentially to be a ritual ceremony. God was giving the city to Joshua and the Israelites; He did not require their plans and strategy. The use of the past tense “delivered” (v. 2) shows that while the event had not yet happened, the outcome was decided by the Lord.

>Have a volunteer read Joshua 6:6-11

5. Why was the ark of the Lord marched around the city? What was the significance of the ark?

***Leader:*** Beyond the instruction God gave him, Joshua gave further instruction regarding the armed guard that was to walk out in front of the ark. Joshua also expanded upon the way in which the ark was referred to: “the ark of the covenant” (v. 6) and “the ark of the Lord” (vv. 6–7), focusing the people’s attention on it and its significance. The battle plan was God’s and the success would be God’s. Joshua had faith and was obedient. The ark was God’s footstool. It was a visible representation of the invisible presence of God. The ark led them through the wilderness and it would once again lead the march. God marched before His people.

6. Why do you think Joshua told everyone to be silent until the final shout? How did silence call on the people to have faith? If they could not speak to one another, who could they talk to? What is your default action when you have moments of silence in life?

***Leader:*** When difficult issues and seasons of life arise, we would do well to first approach God in prayer. Then we can approach others who can give wise counsel. If we run to others with problems first, then our actions could reveal our faith is first in people, not in God. Additionally, coming to God in prayer is a means of “surfing the wave of what He is up to” even when we don’t understand it. In fact, prayer can help cement us to trust God and His plans when it is counterintuitive to do so. With God’s truth available to us through His Word and His presence with us in prayer, it’s dumbfounding that we would give our minds to anything else.

>Have a volunteer read joshua 6:12-21

7. How do you think the soldiers felt as they marched silently? What temptations would they have faced in carrying out God’s plan for battle? Why would obedience be difficult?

8. What is the hardest thing for you when it comes to trusting God’s plans over your own?

***Leader:*** That faith is required presumes that life will give us ample opportunity to need it. In other words, faith, by definition, is never easy to have and to act on. The means by which Joshua’s soldiers would take Jericho was a great challenge of faith, but so also was their command to devote everything to the LORD by destroying them (vv. 17-19). (*For more on on vv. 17-19, see the commentary on page 4-5*.)

>Have a volunteer read joshua 6:22-27

9. In what ways did God keep His promises? Why is it important to understand that God keeps His promises?

***Leader:*** God kept His promises by delivering the city (except for Rahab and her family, who He had pledged to protect because they cared for the spies—Josh. 2:14, 17-20). We must always remember we are praying to God who keeps His promises. They may not be kept immediately, and not in the manner we would hope for, but in the end He is who He says He is and does what He promises.

 Doing life together

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. What is your Jericho? What walls stand seemingly insurmountable before you? What would be necessary for you to believe that God could have plans for you that are different than your plans to breach the wall?

11. There is often a direct relationship between our trust in God’s plans and the practice of spiritual disciplines. How is your Bible reading and prayer (among other disciplines) possibly impacting your trust? What are we tempted to fill our minds with in place of God’s promises?

12. What is the best example from your own life where God made it very clear that His plans were greater than your own? How can you use that story to shore up your faith with the present walls you face or to help others struggling in a similar way?

 Prayer

Pray Isaiah 55:8-13 together as a group.

 Follow Up

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

❏Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:

How has your pursuit of proper spiritual preparation impacted you this week?

❏A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

 ❏The challenge to memorize Isaiah 55:8 — “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are

 your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.