- **Joshua 8 Grow Group Resources**
- **Sermon Summary: According to Who?**
  - The sermon explores a foundational question: Who gets to decide what is good, beautiful, true, and right? In a culture where truth is increasingly determined by personal feelings and individual preferences, how do we establish what is right and wrong? The foundation of Scripture is that everything belongs to God. As Creator, Designer, and Sustainer of all things, God has the authority to determine what is good and how we are to live. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1).
  - Joshua 8 provides an opportunity to explore this question through Israel's conquest of Ai, particularly when considered alongside the events of Joshua 7. Four important lessons emerge.
  - **1. Forgiveness: Who defines what forgiveness looks like?**
    - Joshua 7 reveals the seriousness of sin and its consequences. Achan had taken what was devoted to the Lord, bringing judgment upon Israel. After the sin was dealt with, however, Joshua 8 opens with a remarkable statement: "And the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not fear and do not be dismayed'" (Joshua 8:1).
    - This is a beautiful picture of God's grace. The sin has been dealt with, forgiveness has been extended, and God's people can move forward.
    - Yet we sometimes struggle with forgiveness in three ways:
      - Receiving forgiveness: We confess our sins but continue carrying shame and condemnation, feeling that we need to do more to earn God's forgiveness.
      - Releasing forgiveness: We readily want God's grace for ourselves but struggle to extend it to those who have hurt us.
      - Recognizing forgiveness in others: We sometimes question whether someone with a particularly difficult past can genuinely experience God's grace.
    - But who gets to decide what forgiveness looks like? Scripture reminds us that forgiveness is God's gift, not something we earn. Romans 10:9 teaches that those who confess Jesus as Lord and believe in His resurrection will be saved. Micah 7:18–19 describes a God who delights in steadfast love, has compassion on His people, and casts their sins into the depths of the sea.
    - When God declares us forgiven through Jesus, we are forgiven. We don't need to continue carrying the shame of what He has already dealt with. God is a God of second chances.

- **2. Plans: Who directs the path of our lives?**
  - There is a significant contrast between Joshua 7 and Joshua 8. In chapter 7, Israel sends only a small number of soldiers to Ai, apparently relying on their own assessment rather than seeking God's direction. The result is defeat and the loss of 36 lives.
  - In chapter 8, God gives specific instructions, including sending all the fighting men and using an ambush strategy. This time, Joshua and the Israelites follow God's direction, and the result is victory. The contrast is clear: God speaks, His people obey, and they follow His plan rather than their own.
  - This raises an important question for our own lives: Do we make our plans and then ask God to bless them, or do we first ask God to guide and direct us?
  - Our own perspective is limited. We are finite, and our understanding of what is best for our lives is incomplete. When we allow God to lead, we gain His perspective and follow His purposes rather than simply pursuing our own ambitions.
- **3. Morality: Who determines what is right and wrong?**
  - One of the most challenging aspects of Joshua is the violence involved in Israel's conquest of the Promised Land. How can we reconcile God's goodness with the destruction of entire cities?
  - The sermon offers several considerations:
    - God's judgment is righteous: The nations being judged were involved in deeply evil practices, including child sacrifice and other abominations (Deuteronomy 18:9–12). God's judgment was not arbitrary; it came after generations of patience (Genesis 15:16).
    - God was protecting His people: Israel was being protected from the destructive practices of the surrounding nations.
    - This was a unique moment in history: The conquest was a specific command for a particular time. It is not a model for the church today. We are not called to use violence against others.
    - God's redemption remains available: Rahab's story demonstrates that those who turn to God in faith can receive His grace, even from outside Israel.
  - Ultimately, the cross brings these themes together. At the cross, God's righteous judgment against sin and His incredible grace intersect. Jesus took upon Himself the punishment we deserved, making forgiveness and new life possible through faith.

- **4. Boundaries: Who establishes the boundaries for our flourishing?**
  - The final lesson comes from the contrast between Achan's actions in Joshua 7 and God's instructions in Joshua 8. At Jericho, the spoils were devoted to God, but at Ai, God permitted Israel to take the plunder. Achan had taken what wasn't his before its time, ultimately missing out on God's provision in the very next battle.
  - This illustrates that God has the authority to establish boundaries and determine timing. Sometimes our sin comes from trying to take today what God intends to provide tomorrow.
  - God's boundaries are not designed to restrict our joy but to protect us and help us flourish. This includes areas such as human sexuality, where God's design establishes boundaries within marriage for our good.
  - True freedom is not doing whatever we feel like doing. It is learning to live within God's good design. His boundaries are expressions of His loving care, generosity, and desire for us to experience the fullness of life.
- **Who Gets to Decide?**
  - The central question of the sermon is ultimately a question of trust. Will we allow our feelings, our culture, or our own limited understanding to determine what is right? Or will we trust the God who created us, loves us, forgives us, and desires our flourishing?
  - Joshua 8 concludes with Israel renewing its covenant with God, reaffirming its commitment to follow His ways. We are invited to do the same: to renew our commitment to trust God as Lord of our lives, to receive His forgiveness, follow His direction, and live within His boundaries.
  - God is the Creator who knows what is good, the Redeemer who offers forgiveness, and the loving Father who desires us to experience the fullness of life. The question is: Will we trust Him enough to live according to His ways?

- **Discussion Questions:**

1. Open up your discussion time wth a word of prayer inviting God to lead the conversation and reveal the Son.
2. Read Joshua 8 out loud.
   A. What questions arise while you hear this story?
   B. What stands out to you from the text?
3. Forgiveness – Joshua 8 begins with God telling Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed" (Joshua 8:1, ESV). After the events of Joshua 7, what does this reveal about God's willingness to restore His people? Why can it sometimes be difficult for us to receive forgiveness from God or extend it to others?
4. Forgiveness – The sermon reminds us that forgiveness is a gift, not something we earn. How does the forgiveness we receive through Jesus change the way we view our past failures, shame, and the failures of others?
5. Plans – In Joshua 7, Israel made its own assessment of the battle against Ai and suffered defeat. In Joshua 8, they followed God's instructions and experienced victory. What is the difference between making our own plans and asking God to bless them, versus seeking His direction from the beginning? Where might this distinction matter in our lives?
6. Morality – The violence and judgment in Joshua 7–8 can be difficult to understand. How should we approach passages in Scripture that challenge our sense of what is right and wrong? What does it mean to trust God's character and judgment even when we don't fully understand His actions?
7. Boundaries – Achan took what God had set apart at Jericho, even though God later allowed Israel to take plunder at Ai. The sermon suggested that sometimes we try to take today what God intends to provide tomorrow. Where do you see this temptation in our lives? How can God's boundaries actually protect us and lead to flourishing?
8. Who Gets to Decide? – The central question of the sermon is who gets to determine what is good, true, right, and moral: God, ourselves, or our culture? Where are you most tempted to let your feelings or cultural expectations take the place of God's direction? What might it look like to recommit yourself to trusting and following Him this week?
9. Ask for the prayer needs in the group, and close with a time of thanks and prayer.