

All-In

December 31, 2016-January 1, 2017

Happy New Year! Please turn to Joshua 3. We've got Bibles for you if you need one, please just raise your hand.

There are some things you can't do part-way; it's either "all-in" or nothing. Like bungee-jumping. There is a turning point moment when you are on the edge of the bridge with the cord attached. You've got to choose. You can't try bungee jumping part-way down just to see if you like it. You are either standing there not bungee-jumping, or you are in the air. There's no in-between!

Some people have an easy time making the decision to jump. They say, "sounds like fun, let's do it!" For other sane, people it can be nerve-wracking to make the choice. They may think, "It could be an amazing experience, or maybe I'll be that rare one and the cord will break. It could be a tremendous rush, but what if I can't handle it?" When people do make the choice to go off the bridge, afterwards they say, "That was amazing!"

If you want to have the amazing experience of free-falling off a bridge and living to tell about it, you've got to go "all-in." Reading the Bible, we see there are times God asks people to go all-in with Him in order to see God do something amazing. Joshua 3 is one of those times. Joshua 3 records a major turning point in the history of Israel; they weren't just starting a new year; they were starting a new era as a nation.

Here's a bit of back story: The Jews were slaves in Egypt for 400 years until God directed Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. They didn't, however, go straight into the land God promised. Instead, they wandered in the desert for 40 years. Most of the adults who came out of Egypt died during this time, including Moses himself. Then God appointed Moses' apprentice, Joshua, to be the new leader. Moses led the people out; Joshua would lead the people in.

In Joshua 3, God tells Joshua that the big moment has arrived. The people are actually going to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land they had dreamed about for so long. Instead of living in tents, they could finally build their own houses, plant their own crops, and so on.

Joshua 3:1-3 *Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.*

The people are going to follow the Ark of the Covenant into their new life. There's a reason for that. The Ark of the Covenant was a gold-covered wooden box that contained the two stone tablets of the 10 Commandments that God gave Moses. It also had Aaron's rod and some manna. The Jews preserved the 10 commandment tablets as reminders of the *covenant* God had made with them.

"Covenant" is not a word we use a lot today. **A covenant = a solemn agreement**, where two parties make vows. The covenant creates a relationship. Each party has privileges and responsibilities in the relationship. It was kind of like what we would call a contract today, but not exactly. The covenant God made with the Jews was "I will be your God, and you will be my people." The tablets with the 10 commandments were in the Ark of the Covenant to remind Israel of their responsibilities as God's people. The commandments were their part in their covenant relationship with God.

Today our relationship with God is also based on a covenant, but it is a different one. It is the New Covenant. Our relationship with God is no longer based on our ability to carry out the 10 Commandments. It is based on our commitment and trust in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. That leads us to a deeper obedience than the 10 commandments.

The new covenant God made with us is through Jesus. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and in **Luke 22:20** said, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.* We have a new covenant relationship with God.

John Wesley was founder of the Methodist movement. Wesley believed that all Christians should reaffirm their covenant with God once per year, so in 1755 he created a service in which an individual renews his/her covenant with God. Later in today's service we're going to do what those early Methodists did: renew our Covenant with God through the historic Wesley Covenant prayer.

God told Joshua that after 40 years, the time had come to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land. He was finally going to bring them into their own land where they would be free! **Joshua 3:4-5** *⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it.*" They are going into territory they didn't know, but he tells them that by following the ark of the covenant, they won't get lost.

Then Joshua tells the people how to prepare for this major moment in their lives. *⁵ Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."* They were not just to pack their belongings, they were to "consecrate" their hearts. **Consecrated = completely designated for a special purpose.**

For example, a while back I needed to clip an article out of the paper so I grabbed some scissors out of Linda's knitting basket and clipped it. When Linda saw me cutting, she said, "Don't use those! They're my good sewing scissors! They are only to be used for cutting yarn!" I didn't realize that I had sinned. I had used consecrated scissors for profane purposes. Her scissors were completely designated for the purpose of cutting yarn. To clip newspapers, I needed to use non-consecrated scissors.

Joshua said, "Consecrate yourselves," that is, set yourself apart for God's special purposes. The people were going into a land that was already occupied. They were going to need the power of God to help them take possession of the land. They didn't know it at the time, but they were going to see amazing things as they conquered the land. They were going to see city walls fall down at the sound of a trumpet. They were going to see the sun stand still during a battle. They didn't know all that at the time, but Joshua told them that if they consecrated themselves, if they went all-in, they would see God do amazing things.

I believe God is telling us the same thing as we prepare to enter 2017: "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow, in 2017, the Lord will do amazing things among you." **When we go all-in, God will do amazing things.** Mark Batterson wrote that "many of us would love to do great things for God, but that isn't our job: it is God's job. Our job is to consecrate ourselves." This takes the pressure off of us! God never asks us to do the impossible. HE is asking us to commit ourselves fully to him and then HE will do the impossible.

Where do you want to see God's power in your life? Would you like to see your addictions broken? Do you want to get out of debt? Do you want to see God use your life to reach and bless others? Would you like to have more passion for Jesus than ever, and hear his voice clearly?

God can do more than we ask or imagine in 2017, if we will consecrate ourselves - go "all-in" with Him. The Bible says this, and history shows this. John Wesley once said, *"Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth."* Well, he got his 100 preachers, and [they literally changed the world!](#)

Wesley's commitment to do whatever God asked sparked a fire of spiritual awakening that changed the world. So many people came to Christ under his ministry that it changed England. Some historians credit the revival movement with saving England from a revolution like there was in America or France. France is just over 20 miles away across the English Channel. At the same time England was turning to God through the revival, France was turning away from God through the French Revolution. The results were drastically different. In

England, the revival brought greater social stability as fewer men were getting drunk and more started saving and working. In France the revolution made blood flow in the streets in what became known as “The Terror.”

In the United States, Methodism was an amazing movement of God. In 1770 there were 20 Methodist churches in America. After the revival known as the Second Great Awakening, by 1860 there were over 19,000 Methodist churches transforming the nation. Today there are people all over the globe who are “all-in” for God and seeing him do amazing things. Most of them will never be written about in a book or appear in a video.

But there are ordinary believers in Iran who are risking their lives to share the Gospel where it is illegal. The result is movement of an estimated 1 million followers of Jesus in underground churches there. There are anonymous African men and women who are quietly serving Jesus by serving the needs of starving children and poor families.

What can happen this year in our area if we were a group of people who “**Fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but God**”? What if that phrase described your life this year? Fearing nothing but sin and desiring nothing but God would simplify our decisions and goals, wouldn’t it?

John Wesley made an historic, global impact for the Gospel. And yet, on his death bed, his last words were not about the work or his accomplishments. His last words were, “Best of all, God is with us!” Above all, he desired God. And he lived and died with the knowledge that God was with him.

At the end of this year, we can have a greater passion for Jesus, if we go all-in. **People who are all-in, let God lead.** Joshua told the people to *follow* the ark of the covenant. They were not to get out in front of it and try to take it where they wanted to go. ⁶ *Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them.*

Because the people followed, they got to see God work in amazing ways! For example, they camped around a highly-fortified city called Jericho. On their own they never would have chosen to do that, because it looked impossible to conquer. But God said to do it, so they did. Then God said to march around the city 6 times, so they did. They wouldn’t have plotted that strategy out, and they never used that strategy again, but because God said to do it, they did. Then they went around a 7th time and shouted, and then they saw the most amazing thing: the walls fell down!

You may face a major battle yourself this year. Maybe it will be a battle for health, or career or confidence or relationship. Go “all-in” with God. Let him lead you. Listen first. Let him guide. Let God call the shots, give God veto power over your plans and decisions.

What do you have planned for 2017? Submit that to God. As you start each day, what if you asked God to guide you in each of the events that are planned for the day, even your recreation? Before you spend money, will you pray about it and ask God's guidance? What if you invite God to put in your mind ideas for what he wants you to be doing? Who he wants you to serve?

We will have lots of opportunity to let God lead us this year, and it will help us be even more connected to him, more reliant on him, and increase our confidence in him. That is the way to a full life!

Take a step of obedience. God told the Jews to act on their commitment right away, and the result was that they saw something amazing. First, in verse 8, God told Joshua to go stand in the Jordan. *⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'*" The river was at flood stage, so that was a little dangerous. Then Joshua tells everyone that God is going to stop the river from flowing so they can cross (he was Moses' apprentice after all!). But here is the catch, they must step into the water before it will stop. Joshua tells the priests to take the ark and stand in the flooding river. You would understand if the priests said, "We'll step in when the water stops flowing..."

But that is not the way obedience works, that's not the way faith works. First step in the water, *then* it stops. *Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.* They acted and then they saw God do an amazing thing! But first they had to go "all-in" so that whatever God said, they would do it! This year you will have the opportunity to act on what God says. Understand that often you will have to take a step before you know how it will turn out.

Just before Thanksgiving, I saw on Facebook a post from a guy I really didn't know. He is not a part of our church, and I had only ever talked with him once. He was describing how he was going through a very difficult experience. I saw a lot of people encouraging him in their comments, but no one was saying anything about the power of God to help. I thought, maybe I should private message him to let him know that God can help him. But I didn't act on that. Later that night I thought about it again, this time with some more urgency. So I thought, "OK, in the morning I will private message him."

The next morning was Thanksgiving. When I went on Facebook, there was a message from him, saying "please pray for me." And that's it. I prayed and messaged him back saying I had, and that I wanted to go to visit him in the

hospital where he was. I didn't hear anything back for an hour or so, so I got in the car and drove over. On the way to his room I saw that he had messaged back "It's Thanksgiving and you should have a holiday, so don't come." Too late; I was already there. I went in, had a really good conversation with him, and explained the Gospel using the method we learned through the Disciple Making Movements training here. He said he was nervous but chose to receive Christ. We've been meeting together to talk about how to grow since then. I didn't know what would happen when I took the initial step, but I was amazed at what God did.

God will do amazing things among us in 2017, if we are "all-in." I realize I regularly talk about doing this. But that makes sense because a disciple of Jesus is one who loves and obeys Jesus. Taking steps of obedience is an essential part of growing spiritually!

That was the approach in the Radiance Initiative: to ask God "what do you want me to do?", then do it. I have already heard a few stories of people who did that and have seen God work in remarkable ways.

Let's begin 2017 by expressing to God our readiness to go "all-in" with Him. During Communion take a few minutes to review the words of the Covenant prayer. We're going to pray it aloud together on the Eve of this New Year. It's not a prayer you say lightly or casually. The first few times I prayed this prayer I had a sense of awe. The words didn't roll off my tongue easily. I felt the weight of the meaning of what I was declaring.