

Unstuck

1. *It's Go Time*

January 6-7, 2017

[To our online readers - this content might vary from the message video]

Happy New Year! Please turn to Joshua 1 --- it's in the Old Testament, toward the beginning of the Bible. Everyone who has used a computer at some point has seen the dreaded buffering symbol on their screen. If you are watching an online video on a slow internet connection, the picture will freeze and this symbol appears while you wait for the data feed to load. Then you're stuck. It might take only a few seconds, but it can seem like forever, especially if you are just getting started on the movie and you don't know if it's worth the time.

Last week I realized that my life has been buffering in a few areas. I was looking at a list of goals I made 4 years ago on New Year's Day, 2014. I accomplished some of those goals, but others are still on my list today.... Four years later! They are areas where I have to admit I have been *stuck*....I've been buffering!

Have you ever felt like your life is buffering? Stuck in the same place? Even if making resolutions and goals are not your thing, you might notice the buffering if you take a step back and look. You might realize that you, too, are stuck in some areas. Maybe you've gotten stuck in a relationship. You've been dating for years and years and he isn't asking you to marry him... you're waiting, you're waiting, but it's not happening. Or maybe you've been stuck *without* a date for years. You'd like to be in a relationship, you've tried the online dating apps, but you're still stuck.

Or spiritually, maybe you have been stuck in a rut, going through the motions, but not much is changing. Or maybe you're stuck in a habit, or indecision. We all get stuck somewhere, eventually. Sometimes we get used to being stuck. We get comfortable with what is familiar. We tell ourselves that we *like* where we are. We enjoy watching the buffering circle go around and around. But the question is, does *God* want you stuck there? Maybe he doesn't want you to settle there because he has a better future in mind!

Stuck = living with less than God promised

God has promised us a lot! **Ephesians 1:3** says God has *blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ*. But often we settle for a lot less than God promised. We settle for less relational connection and less impact. We're made for more! And it doesn't honor God when we settle for less.

For example, indecision makes us feel stuck. God doesn't want us to stay there because He promised to give us wisdom. **James 1:5** says, *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

We can get stuck in chronic anxiety. But it doesn't honor God to give up and accept that as our future, because God promised us peace. Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you..." (John 14:27) and the fruit of the Spirit is peace. (Gal. 5:22)* The people of Israel got stuck in the desert for 40 years. That's a long time to buffer! The book of Joshua is the story of how they got unstuck and entered the Promised Land. Joshua and the Israelites are on the verge of something big. Here is the back story. The Jews had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years until Moses led them to escape into the desert. But God did not intend for them to live in the desert. He wanted them to pass through, not to settle there. Centuries before, God promised Abraham he would give his descendents a land flowing with milk and honey (the land we call Israel.) But they got stuck in the desert --- in a life that was less than God had promised.

All during that time, the Israelites were led by Moses, and Joshua was his second in charge. In chapter one we read that Moses died, and Joshua, Moses' second in charge, became the new leader of the Israelites. God declares that Joshua was the one who would lead these people into the Promised Land. **Joshua 1:2-3** *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. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.* Moses died and change was coming.

Sometimes it takes a significant event to make us aware that we can't keep things as they were ... change is going to happen. God had not forgotten that he had promised this land to the people of God hundreds of years before. Now finally - it was time to enter in and claim what God promised!

We can read this story on two levels. On one level, its history, telling us how the Jews entered the Promised Land. On another level, its current events - describing to us how we can get unstuck and start to live out God's promises to us. What holds us back from living out God's promises to us? What makes us stuck?

What keeps us stuck: Fear

The unknown can make us nervous and fearful -- even if we know that it is supposed to be something good, it is still different. In Joshua 1, the Jews are near the River Jordan, which borders the Promised Land. They had been here before. Not long after they left Egypt decades before, the people came to the edge of the Jordan but they but didn't enter the Promised Land. Why not? Fear.

The first time they gathered at the Jordan, Moses sent 12 spies to check out the land. 10 came back with a very negative report. They told the people that the inhabitants were too powerful to conquer. They told Moses that the Jews didn't stand a chance. Joshua was also part of that reconnaissance team, but he gave the minority report. He said they could win with God on their side. But the majority ruled, and the people stayed in the desert.

God had been true to his promise. He brought them safely to the land flowing with milk and honey. But the majority stopped trusting God. They rejected his clear promises of faithfulness, and they forfeited their opportunity to take their inheritance, the Promised Land. So that generation died in the wilderness.

Fast forward to Joshua 1. Joshua is camped with the people by the banks of the Jordan River again. The land still looks scary. There is a large river to cross. There are fortified cities filled with highly motivated and trained warriors to conquer. His mentor was dead and it was up to him to lead the whole nation to fight their way into a new land. God knew Joshua would need some encouragement. He speaks to him like a soldier. Listen to what God repeatedly says to Joshua in verses 6-9.

- *Verse 6: Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.*
- *Verse 7: Be strong and very courageous.*
- *Verse 9: Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.*

We get the picture -- God wants to make sure Joshua doesn't lose heart and stay in the desert again. The longer we live in the desert, the harder it is to move into the Promised Land.

If you are going to get unstuck and claim the promises of God for your life, you will probably face some fear. One of those fears is the fear of failure. If we reach for something new, how do we know we won't fail? It can feel risky to apply for the new job - we might get turned down. If I try to go to school, ask someone out or throw a party, it might not work out well.

We're told that at the end of their lives, most people regret the things they didn't do more than the things they did. Because the things we don't do keep us from becoming the people we can be. It's normal to feel some fear when moving in a new direction; just don't give in to it. It will take courage to move from stuck to unstuck. It takes courage to stop thinking negatively and start embracing hope. It takes courage to reach out to form a new friendship. It takes courage to start a new business. In fact, that is why Linda and I named our first son "Joshua" - so that he would be strong and courageous. We knew that living for God would require courage.

Just because you feel fear doesn't mean you can't be courageous. John Wayne said, "Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway." Some of you here today have been afraid to claim the promises God has for you. He has wanted to change and bless your life, but you have drawn back because it seems safer where you are. What if this year you ignore the fear and get unstuck? How can we keep fear from robbing us of what God intends for us?

Review God's promises.

When Joshua first spied out the land, he said "We can do it, because God is with us and will give us the victory." He was reminding himself of God's promise to give Abraham's descendents the land. That gave him courage. In verse 6 God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous because *you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.* God is reminding Joshua of the promise, which will give him courage.

Is there an area of your life you are stuck? Find a promise in the Bible that applies to it and then memorize it. When I was in seminary preparing to be a pastor, Linda and I had no money. We couldn't afford to buy ornaments for our first little Christmas tree, so we made some out of pipe cleaners and beads. Linda was working as an admin, and I had two part time jobs. But we had school bills to pay, and a new baby we weren't really prepared for. We were just one unexpected expense away from disaster all the time. I was feeling stressed because I felt very responsible for my young family's welfare. One day I came across *Psalm 111:5 He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.* I thought, "That's God's promise to me." So I repeated that to myself over and over again, especially when the future looked uncertain. And we always had enough.

Wherever you are stuck, there is a promise from God. If you are discouraged, there's a promise for that. If you are lonely, there is a promise for that. If you are sick or depressed, there is a promise for that. Find it and remind yourself of it often. Write it on a card. Memorize it.

False humility

Sometimes we get stuck because we think, "Who am I to claim God's promises?" With all that is going on in the world, why would God pay attention to my family? Who am I to think that God would heal my daughter? Why would God give me power to break my addiction? That's a false humility because God does not fulfill his promises because we are worthy, he does it because he is faithful. God has made us his children, and to say we are nobody is a false humility. And false humility leads to buffering in our lives. We get stuck.

God knew Joshua would have some self-doubt. He was taking over for Moses, so it would have been natural to compare himself to his former mentor. That's a quick way to feel inferior: compare yourself to the greatest leader in

Israel's history and a guy who appeared with Elijah on the mountain to talk with the transfigured Jesus. So in verse 9 God tells him to be strong and courageous, adding **Have I not commanded you?** God was reminding Joshua that it was his plan for Joshua to lead the people, not Joshua's ambition. When you are seeking to get unstuck, just remember that it is God's promise that will do it, not your worthiness that counts.

We can see Joshua's courage kick in, and he realizes it is go time. He takes two crucial steps that will help unstick the Israelites and move them into the Promised Land - the same two steps we need to take when we are stuck.

When it's go time ...

Prepare for action

Verses 10-11 say, *So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"* If the people were going to move into the Promised Land, they needed to get ready to move. Joshua told them to pack their possessions. He gave them a time table -- a deadline. We need the same things in order to get unstuck: we need a plan and a deadline.

When I was looking over my list of resolutions from 4 years ago, I saw some goals I accomplished and some I did not. I believed all of them were consistent with God's call on me, but I didn't treat them all equally. I noticed that next to the goals I achieved I had written a basic plan for how I was going to accomplish it. That made the difference. If I write down what I'm going to do, it makes me get specific. If I write down when I am going to do it, I have a goal. Goals motivate. Goals move us forward and get us unstuck. A goal is simply a dream with a deadline. Joshua said, pack your things, meet me in three days and be ready to go. And he later told them where to meet. If he had just said, "We're going to have our own land someday" ... nothing would have happened.

Jeff Bezos started a company called Amazon in 1994. He said the company would be committed to thinking long-term. Many companies could say the same thing, but Bezos made a plan. In 1997 he wrote his first letter to share holders, outlining nine ways Amazon would demonstrate their long-term approach. Every year since then, he reprints that original letter on the first page of the annual report. He made a plan, and it worked. Amazon is not stuck.

If God is going to fulfill his promise to you today, what would have to change? That is your plan right there! If you are going to be a better spouse, what specifically are you going to do to make that reality? If you are going to get closer to God, what will you do? If you are going to get in better shape, what work outs will you do -- how often? God promises, we plan to claim them. God won't do the plan for us, but he will empower us when we start moving. And as

you do, evaluate your plan: is your plan working? If not, change it! If you've been running the same play and getting thrown for a loss, it's time to run a new play!

Finally, when it's go time...

Take a step

In Joshua 1:3 God tells Joshua *I will give you every place where you set your foot*. For Israel to get unstuck, they had to move their feet toward the promise. So do we. We have to get moving. You can't steer a parked car. Once you take the first step, God's power is released and more faith will come.

In 2010 I was at a seminar about getting involved with church planting in Europe. For several years I had a growing desire to be involved in some way, but I didn't know how. Unfortunately, the seminar didn't give me the answer. I remember leaving the seminar and walking down the hallway of First Baptist Church in Orlando, complaining to God that I was frustrated not knowing what to do. Then a thought went through my mind with clarity, "You will be involved soon." 3-4 weeks later, I got an email out of the blue from a guy I never heard of. He lived in France and had seen some blog posts I had written. He asked if I would coach him in small group ministry. I agreed and we started corresponding, and about 4 months later I felt like I needed to take another step. So I researched some church planters online, emailed them and asked to visit. They all said yes and each one offered to host me overnight. So I got on a plane and went to France for a week, with no hotel reservations or train tickets -- just hoping someone I had never met before would show up at the train station that day. They did, and at the end Manu de Maleprade returned with me to do an internship with us. Today we are helping 4 church plants in France and looking to start a network of new churches in that country.

Take a step. 2018 does not need to be a replay of 2017. You do not need to be stuck. I want to pray for you to be free to move as we sing this song together. Come on forward and let's pray, and watch God's power in your life in 2018.