



Here are some wise words from a successful business owner aimed to equip the next generation for life. See if you can guess who he is. This is from something he calls his eleven rules.

- Life is not fair - get used to it!
- If you think your teacher is tough, wait till you get a boss.
- Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger flipping: they called it opportunity.
- If you mess up, it's not your parents' fault, so don't whine about your mistakes, learn from them.
- Life is not divided into semesters. You don't get summers off and very few employers are interested in helping you FIND YOURSELF. Do that on your own time.
- Television is NOT real life. In real life people actually have to leave the coffee shop and go to jobs.
- Before you were born, your parents weren't as boring as they are now. They got that way from paying your bills, cleaning your clothes and listening to you talk about how cool you thought you were.
- Be nice to nerds. Chances are you'll end up working for one.

Wise and pragmatic words from Bill Gates, words the Reid family had posted on our refrigerator door for many years! Don't we perk up and pay attention when successful men and women have something to tell us? I find it even more interesting to hear what great men and women have to say when they are old and they know that their time is short. I really tune in when they want their most important life lessons passed down to benefit the next generation.

We can find examples of this in the historical greats in the Bible too. Today we will look at Joshua 23. By this time we know that Joshua was an old man who knew his time on earth was coming to an end. He was likely 40 years old when he and Caleb spied out the land after leaving Egypt. He wandered in the wilderness with the Israelites another 40 years. The conquest of Canaan took another 7 years. In Joshua 24 it's recorded that Joshua died at a ripe old age of 110. So there was at least 20 years that passed between chapter 22, which Mark taught us last week, and chapter 23, our text for today. Knowing he was soon to pass from the scene, Joshua gives a final charge, some famous last words he wanted to pass on to the next generation.

These famous last words are Joshua's final charge to Israel's chief elders, leaders, judges and officials. Chapter 23 is a sermon, a very personal sermon. I hope you find Joshua's words to be an

encouragement as well as a challenge that includes a serious warning to all of us as we seek to lead in our church, in our marriages, with our kids and in our workplaces. The theme that keeps repeating in Joshua's famous last words is this: Remember what God has done for you. In fact here is our big idea this morning: Remember what God has done for you and tell the next generation all His ways.

### Remember What God has Done for You

**After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: "I am very old. You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west (verses 1-4).**

Joshua starts out with a wonderful reminder to them that they have seen all that the Lord their God has done for their sake. He reminds them that they were able to conquer God's enemies because it was the Lord who fought for them. Joshua is telling them that they deserve no credit, because it was God who accomplished everything. For me, I need these kinds of reminders. My hindsight is not very good. The farther I look back on events in my life the more heroic I sound. I am much too quick to give myself credit for how things have gone. This passage reminds me that every single day, I have to remember. I have to remember that every good gift comes from God, every good thing that happens is because of Him. He is the giver of life, of opportunity and success. God deserves the credit because all that is good is a result of His grace.

We will see that Joshua doesn't talk about himself much in this sermon. He is a leader who doesn't draw attention to himself or his audience as being responsible for their victories, even though they were the ones who circled Jericho, who chased the Canaanites and defeated them on that longest day, who waged hand-to-hand combat in the northern and southern campaigns. Joshua doesn't tell them how great they are; he tells them how great God is. He doesn't tell them how faithful they are; he tells them how faithful their God is.

**The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you (v. 5).**

And verse 5 tells us that God wasn't done yet. There were still pockets of resistance to flush out. There was more for God to do. Joshua told them to not go weak and stay on mission and finish

the task. He is saying, "you are privileged to have seen what God had done, and so you know certain things about God." Let what you now know about God and His ways rule the day. Let what you know—not what you might be feeling at the moment—steer you into decisions of faith, decisions that require courage, decisions that make a stand for righteousness, compassion and love.

If they were having doubts or getting wobbly about the future, they were to look back and remember how their God reached into events and delivered them. Because of God, the Egyptian army was drowned. Because of God, the Israelites were guided across the wilderness by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. Because of God, they crossed the Jordan on dry ground during the flood stage. Because of God, the walls of Jericho came down. Because of God, the sun stood still and the armies of the five Amorite kings were destroyed. Because of God the southern and northern kingdoms were routed. Because of God the Israelites literally stood on the promises of God!

It's good to look back and remember. Many of us have a similar faith story. As we look back at how things have happened in our lives, we know that the reason we are in the place we are today is because God was faithful. He can be trusted. This really is a spiritual discipline of remembering what God has done. This will continue to be very important to the Israelites because they will face the temptation to be pulled into the ways of the Canaanite world around them. In the next section, Joshua says their future success is not just remembering God, it's also obeying God.

**Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now (verses 6-8).**

Joshua says, to achieve success as God defines success, we are called to obey God's Word. This isn't a new idea in Joshua. In Chapter 1 God told Joshua he would be successful if he obeyed God's Word. Now Joshua is telling the next generation not to be fooled by the false promises of the world that tries to turn them to the right or the left. He says stay straight and obey God's Word because God's Word is food for their souls, their wisdom, their playbook, their armor against attacks by the enemy, their weapons against all spiritual powers of darkness, their truth that sets them free, their higher power.

Joshua remembered from his own experience that he couldn't be strong and courageous without being anchored to God's Word. Spiritual success as God defines success came to Joshua because Joshua loved God's Word and he drew close to God through reading, studying, meditating on and trusting God's Word. While doing this he discovered that God was with him and it was this connection to God that enabled him to obey.

The phrase "hold fast" means cleave, or hang on tight, to stick like glue. It's the same word used in Genesis 2:24 about the exclusive relationship between a husband and a wife. Joshua is saying don't get sticky with the other gods out there. Don't bow

to them. We face the temptation to get sticky with other gods and not rely on the Lord every day. False promises of success bombard us every day. There are temptations to water down His word and compromise His truth because it just seems like life would be easier in this world if we did. There are temptations to give up on standing for what is right because no one likes to be accused of being judgmental and intolerant or legalistic. It's harder to stay strong on truth than not. But God says remember what He has done. Remember by praying, reading, and meditating on God's Word.

We don't talk about the subject of meditating very much in church. But we don't talk about meditating on God's Word enough in the church. Back in Joshua 1, God told Joshua to meditate on His Word day and night. When we think of meditation, what comes to mind for many of us is sitting cross-legged, palms up, while chanting something over and over.

What does meditating God's way really mean? Meditation is a good Biblical word. It means dull sound... I love it. It's means to always be thinking about what God says and how he works in our lives. Meditating means letting God's Word linger, turning it over and over in our minds, and hearing it play over and over quietly in the background of our daily lives. As God told Joshua in chapter 1, meditate on my word day and night so when those inevitable challenges and trials come, we just turn up the volume of God's Word that is already playing in our minds, already on our lips, ready to speak into the situation.

I've heard it said that if we really challenge people to read their Bibles every day we risk encouraging legalism. But my experience is that when I read the Bible seriously and regularly I don't drift into legalism. I find greater freedom and an ability to live life with more grace and love. Arthur Rubinstein, the world famous pianist wrote years ago about the importance of practicing every day: "If I don't practice one day, nobody knows. If I don't practice two days, then I know. But if I don't practice three days, the whole world can tell."

I know when I am not in tune with the Lord through His Word. Others who know me well can see it too. I become edgy and cynical. I lose my sense of humor. Also, I know I'm not growing because I will be talking more about God in the past tense. I know I am not experiencing spiritual success when I am more comfortable to share about what God taught me way back in my past rather than to talk in the present about what He is teaching me right now. If I asked you after church, "What is God teaching you right now?" how would you answer the question? Your answer will be directly related to your commitment to His Word today.

**"The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised (verses 9-10).**

Joshua is saying, "God is faithful to His promises. God is fighting for Israel, how else could one Israelite route a thousand Canaanites?" So Joshua's famous last words are to remember what God has done and to obey to God's Word. And it's to be very careful to love God. Look at verse 11.

**So be very careful to love the Lord your God.**

At the very midpoint of his very famous last words, Joshua says love God. Literally be very careful, take an intense self-examination, ask yourself the question, "Do I love God more than anything?" Remember last week when Mark showed us Joshua 22:5? Joshua said to the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan, *"be careful to keep the commandments and the law of Moses, to love the Lord your God, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and soul."* See how keeping, loving, obeying, holding fast, and serving all link together? We can't say we love God more than anything if our feelings of love for God are disconnected from our acts of obedience to God. Love and obedience go together. In 1st John 2:5 John says, *"But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them."*

Joshua's famous last words here remind us of Deuteronomy 6:5, the Shema, where Moses says to the Israelites, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."* It's the Old Testament verse that Jesus refers to when He was asked what was the greatest of all the commandments. Some additional good news is that we are called to love a God who actually is the source of love and loved us first. In 1st John 4:19 John says, *"We love because he (God) first loved us."* Love for God isn't something I am commanded to manufacture on my own. Love is who God is, so if I am not holding tight to Him I can't love or obey with any sense of passion.

Remember what Jesus asked Peter three times on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection, and after their beautiful breakfast and reconciliation? Jesus asked this, "Peter, do you love me?" Everything depends on this. When Peter answered "yes" Jesus then said, "so if you love me do what I call you to do. Feed and care for my sheep." When I accept and embrace God's love for me, and when I accept and embrace my call to love Him and obey Him, I am connected to His purpose and perspective and I am safe. Every relationship challenge, every ministry challenge, every insecure feeling, every future unknown falls into a healthy place.

In the second half of his speech, Joshua gives two very serious warnings, just in case they were not listening.

**But if you turn away and yourselves ally with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you (verses 12-13).**

It seems like we have already heard the warning before about being unequally yoked. Why does Joshua keep referring to it? Because the problem kept reoccurring. It was the most severe problem throughout Israel's history in the land. It affected almost every generation that followed. It was the dominant problem in the period of the Judges. It was Solomon's downfall and it split the kingdom. It caused the fall of the Northern Kingdom as well as the Southern Kingdom. It was a problem right before and even after the exile.

Joshua's words were prophetic about the troubles that were to come for the Israelites when they became contaminated by the beliefs in other gods. Here is verse 7 again. I think it has some great principles for what Jesus meant in the New Testament when He told us what it means for us live in the world but not become like the world.

**Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them (v. 7).**

Joshua knew that the Canaanite culture could appear more sophisticated and seductive to the next generation than Israelite worship. Joshua was warning that they could be seduced by how their neighbors lived. Most of us today don't practice Canaanite worship. We don't build an idol and sacrifice to it. We don't have sex with temple prostitutes. We don't offer our children to Molech, the god of the underworld. But idolatrous worship is always trying to creep into the very life of the Christian community.

This past summer Julie and I were taking our walk in a park by our house. We were totally engaged in conversation—we were still walking on pavement at this time—and Julie happened to look up first and notice what looked like a crooked stick on the path in front of us. But this crooked stick caught her attention because it was moving. If she hadn't looked up we would have stepped right over it. It was a snake! I tried to get Julie to pose next to the snake so I could get size perspective in my shot! So we watched this snake slowly slither across our path and around this sign and then off into the woods. A few other walkers from our neighborhood came by and as a group we were standing there watching this snake, hoping no unleashed dog would get in its way.

Then my Wisconsin came out. I opened my big mouth and actually said out loud in San Mateo County, "I wish I had brought my 45 along to shoot this thing." No one said amen; it was just awkward silence. Oops. Then I got a correction from a fellow nature lover that told us we are in this snake's natural habitat and we are imposing on this rattlesnake and he has every right to be here. In fact, the snake has even more of a right to be there than I did. I shut my mouth. Just another reminder that I was not in Wisconsin anymore!

But as I got to thinking, her words gave me a valuable spiritual insight. When we move into and live in a place, we cannot help but be affected by what is already in that area. Why would we be surprised when we settle in rattlesnake habitat to see rattlesnakes there that can bite us? We need to stay alert to the snakes in our midst. In the same way why should we as Christians be surprised when we settle in a worldly habitat to see worldly snakes there that can bite us? We need to stay alert. God has called us to live in a world that's crawling with worldly snakes, but He hasn't called us to start slithering or playing with them. He hasn't called us to invite them into our homes or our hearts. There are consequences for unfaithfulness. God has called all of us to live in this world and stay faithful to Him at the same time all for His glory.



One more time Joshua calls on the Israelites to remember. His last words of his famous last words are:

**Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you (verses 14-16).**

Finally Joshua ends with one more dire warning. You wonder as an old man who had seen it all if he was warning them or pronouncing judgment. I get the impression that Joshua had a sick feeling that he knew that they would eventually fall into idol worship. I also get the feeling that Joshua has such great spiritual insight that he knew that no future judge, or prophet, or general, not even himself, and not any future king could save them except for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

A few years back in a sermon by Doug Goins at Peninsula Bible Church, Doug refers to a book by Os Guinness called *No God But God*. It was a collection of essays. And one essay, written by Richard Keyes, was titled "The Idol Factory." He was concerned about the danger of idol worship in the church. He covers the subject of what an idol is. The bottom line is that an idol is anything that we allow to take God's place. He writes: "An idol can be a physical object, a property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero—anything that can substitute for God. We can recognize ways in which we disobey God out of our loyalty to them. But many nonobvious things can work as idols as well, causing us to ignore or distort God's commands to us. For example, work, a commandment of God, can become an idol if it is pursued so exclusively that responsibilities to one's family are ignored. Family, an institution of God Himself, can become an idol if one is so preoccupied with the family that no one outside of one's own family is cared for. Being well-liked, a perfectly legitimate hope, becomes an idol if the attachment to it means that one never risks disapproval. To summarize, idols will inevitably involve self-centeredness, self-inflation, and self-deception. Idolatry begins with the counterfeiting of God, because only with a counterfeit of God can people remain the center of their lives and loyalties, autonomous architects of their futures. Something within creation will then be idolatrously inflated to fill the God-shaped hole in the individual's world. But a counterfeit is a lie, not the real thing. It must present itself through self-deception, often with images suggesting that the idol will fulfill promises for the good life."

I think we are pretty good at identifying the snakes that can bite us in our habitat. Some of the idols we bow to are work, sex,

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

power, real estate, nature, money, education, children, beauty and entertainment. I'm sure something on that list applies to every one of us in this room.

The longer I am around, the more I am convinced that the temptation to bow to these idols stems from fear... maybe a fear of not being accepted, of how others might think of you if they really knew you, of failure, of loneliness or a fear of having less. I want to close our service with a story of a woman named Jessie Rice who stopped bowing to an idol that had bound her. She writes about it in something she called her church of Facebook blog. I think her post is especially relevant to anyone who has daughters or ministers to younger women.

*Dear Fear-Of-What-Others-Think:*

*I am sick of you, and it's time we broke up. I know we've broken up and gotten back together many times, but seriously, Fear-Of-What-Others-Think, this is it. We're breaking up. I'm tired of overthinking my status updates on Facebook, trying to sound more clever, funny, and important. I'm sick of feeling anxious about what I say or do in public, especially around people I don't know that well, all in the hope that they'll like me, accept me, praise me. I run around all day feeling like a Golden Retriever with a full bladder: Like me! Like me! Like me!*

*Because of you, I go through my day with a cloud of shame hanging over my head, and I never stop acting. The spotlight's always on, and I'm center stage, and I'd better keep dancing, posturing, mugging, or else the spotlight will move, and I'll dissolve into a little, meaningless puddle on the ground, just like that witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. I can never live up to the expectations of my imaginary audience, the one that lives only in my head but whose collective voice is louder than any other voice in the universe.*

*And all of this is especially evil because if I really stop and think about it, and let things go quiet and listen patiently for the voice of the God who made me and the Savior who died for me, in his eyes, it turns out I'm actually—profoundly—precious, lovable, worthy, valuable, and even just a little ghetto-fabulous. When I find my true identity in Christ, then you turn back into the tiny, yapping little dog that you are. So eat it, Fear-Of-What-Others-Think. You and I are done. And no, I'm not interested in "talking it through." I'm running, jumping, laughing you out of my life, once and for all. Or at least, that's what I really, really want, God help me.*

May God help us to remember what He has done for us and how much He loves us and may that set us free. May we tell this good news to the next generation. May we tell them to be careful to obey God, and to be careful to love God for their own good and for God's glory. May we have the courage to warn them that there are consequences for disobedience and unfaithfulness. And may we let some of our grey hair speak into the lives of the next generation all for the glory of God.

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