



THE MENTOR



Life Lessons from the Promised Land

MARK LENZ

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ISBN 13: 978-1-4141-1584-9

ISBN 10: 1-4141-1584-9

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009908591



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Chapter One

The Day It All Began

“Abiel had a feeling today would be a day that would begin a new life for him.”

Abiel woke up early in the morning. Actually, he didn't sleep much. He couldn't sleep. He didn't want this day to arrive. Yet in the days leading up to this morning, he knew it eventually *would* arrive. And now, with a yawn and a deep breath came the realization that, whether he wanted it or not, the day was here.

The trip. It was going to be long. It was going to be hard. It would be both physically and emotionally exhausting. Abiel didn't want to leave his father and mother, but necessity dictated the events which were to unfold. He now fully realized the impact the day would bring. Abiel had a feeling today would be a day that would begin a new life for him.

As he came to the kitchen for breakfast, his mother Simcha was preparing the meal and his father Ben-Ami was making final preparations for his business trip.

As he sat down at the table, he knew it would do no good, but thought *why not?* “Mother...is it absolutely necessary...”

“We've been through this many times, son. You *must* go and stay with your father's uncle until his business trip is over and I return from my sisters. She is in such poor health. I simply *have to* take the time to be with her and take care of her. And you know how important this trip is to your father. This trip will take him a great distance and will probably take a few months. I know you are apprehensive about spending this time away, but there are no other options. I think it will be a good experience for you.”

The word apprehensive didn't quite describe the depth of Abiel's feelings. *Uneasy*. No, stronger than that. *Anxious*. Yes, certainly. *Nervous*. Of course. Who likes change? Who likes the unknown? What fifteen year old boy relishes the thought of having to live with a distant relative in a distant town for an unknown period of time? Certainly not anyone he knew. And certainly not Abiel!

But there was something his mother had told Abiel in preparing him for this trip that kept echoing his head. She said *this trip will be good for you. It will be a life changing experience for you.*

His mother had explained the reason for her optimism about the trip. Her husband's uncle was a retired general. A great, war hero of the Hebrew people. And not just a war hero, but a great leader. A man with years of experience and insight. A man who knew people and knew God. Simcha was devoted to Yahweh but her husband Ben-Ami didn't speak much of God, nor seem to follow Him. For this reason she thought it would be good for her son to spend time with Ben-Ami's uncle, - Joshua of Timnath-Serah.

But Joshua was old, and his official duties included simply giving speeches from time to time. Not much military action had happened in the land of Canaan for several years. It was relatively peaceful and calm. As a youngster, Abiel heard stories from his father about how Joshua had fought in many fierce battles, and led the whole nation of Israel into Canaan. But these were just stories that vaguely floated in Abiel's memory. He hadn't seen his great uncle in several years. In fact, he doesn't even remember the last time they were together. Simcha told Abiel that he was a very young boy the last time Joshua came to visit, so it is understandable that he didn't remember him.

Still, Abiel couldn't shake a strange feeling. The feeling that this trip would change his life. For the better, he hoped. Abiel felt anxious and nervous that morning. But he also felt a sense of anticipation. In a way, he was eager to find out more about this retired general - this war hero great uncle of his. Perhaps he would hear of great battles, military strategies, and maybe even learn some life lessons along the way. "Well," Abiel sighed to himself, "if I must make the trip I might as well make the best of it."

After the morning meal was done, Abiel, Simcha and Ben-Ami finished packing their belongings and closed up the house. None of them knew exactly the next time they would see their home in Thebez, or each other for that matter. With hugs, kisses and tears they said their goodbyes. Ben-Ami helped Simcha on to her donkey and she began her trip to her sisters. Shortly after she rode off, Abiel and his father mounted their animals and began their trip to Joshua's home outside of Timnath-Serah.

Along the route Abiel and Ben-Ami had lots of time to talk – something they didn't do too often at home. The talks seemed like *father – son talks*, mostly about being responsible and being on good behavior at Joshua's home. Ben-Ami's fatherly advice echoed his mother's sentiments about the trip.

"My uncle was a great man. You could learn a lot from him. He knows how to lead people, deal with difficult issues, and has lots of advice to offer a young boy as yourself" Ben-Ami said.

Abiel didn't appreciate being thought of as a young boy. He felt he was a young man, but also felt this was neither the time nor the place to get in an argument with his father about it. In less than a day, his father would be away on his business trip and Abiel would be in the care of Joshua, so he decided to hold his tongue and not make an issue of it. Perhaps Joshua would see him more as a young man and not a young boy.

The trip was long and hard, just as Abiel had thought when he woke up that morning. As the hours continued on, their trip took them through the many hills of Ephraim, and past the city of Shechem. Ben-Ami seemed to remember that it had some historical significance, but couldn't remember what it was. As they continued on, they could see Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim in the distance and they knew they were getting near Joshua's home. As they approached Timnath-Serah they headed away from the center of town, past the outskirts, into a rural area to Joshua's homestead. The home consisted of several simple buildings – a main house and a few storage sheds and a workshop. The humble dwelling surprised Abiel. He was expecting to see more, considering the fame of his great uncle.

As they came close to the home, Abiel got another surprise. As the old man approached, he was nothing like Abiel had imagined. When he heard that Joshua was around ninety years old, he expected to see a frail old man. But instead, Joshua was strong. He had a rough and rugged exterior. His skin was dark brown and worn from the sun. He had a scar on this face and several cuts and scrapes on his hands. He didn't look *retired*. Yet looking into his eyes, Abiel could see a hint of compassion. Behind the rough exterior hid a loving man. His dark eyes flashed a twinkle that reassured Abiel that everything would be alright.

“Ben-Ami!” Joshua yelled. “It is great to see you. How long has it been? I’ve been eagerly expecting you.”

“Hello Uncle Joshua. Yes, it has been several years. You seem to be in good health.”

“Yes, Yahweh has been good to me and blessed me in many ways. How was your trip?”

“It was long, but we expected that. My son and I had a good amount of time to talk. Do you remember Abiel?”

Abiel stayed in the background, but now had to come forward and be introduced to his great uncle.

“This is my son Abiel” Ben-Ami said with a hint of pride.

“Hello...sir.” Abiel didn’t know what to officially call him.

“Sir? Please, please, let’s not be so formal. My name is Joshua. You can call me that.”

Abiel felt uneasy calling his great uncle, a famous war hero by his first name, but he didn’t feel he had the right to question it.

“Hello...Joshua” he said awkwardly.

“Your father tells me you had a long trip. How did you hold up?”

“I’m fine” Abiel fibbed. He actually was tired, but seeing how strong Joshua appeared, he didn’t want to seem weak by comparison.

“None the less, come in...both of you and let’s talk a little before your father has to continue his trip.”

They entered the house. The furnishings were simple – nothing extravagant. The familiar aroma made him even hungrier. It was pot roast. The smell reminded him of his mother’s pot roast and Abiel wondered if Joshua’s cooking would be as good as hers. Joshua invited Abiel and Ben-Ami to sit down and after a short prayer they began to eat the meal and catch up on what was happening in Ben-Ami and Simcha’s life. Ben-Ami explained the details of the business trip he was on and how much he appreciated that Joshua would take care of Abiel while he was gone.

During the meal, Abiel was quiet. Not because he was uncomfortable or didn’t like the meal, but because he was taking in his new surroundings. He noticed many

strange things in Joshua's home. There were plaques inscribed with wise saying hanging on the walls and doorposts. Earlier he had noticed one on the gate entering Joshua's property. He saw several pictures on the walls of his home. Joshua was even wearing a symbol around his neck that seemed to hold great significance, almost acting as a reminder for him. *Perhaps Joshua, in his old age, was losing his memory*, Abiel thought. But from the energy Joshua displayed, this didn't seem to be the case. Abiel tried to figure out their meaning and more importantly, their purpose for being in Joshua's house. He decided he would wait until he was more comfortable around Joshua to inquire about them. He figured the opportunity would present itself later and he would ask about them then.

After the meal, Ben-Ami gathered his things and got ready to continue his trip. Abiel had to say good bye to yet another parent. Heart-felt words were exchanged between father and son, but no tears. Neither Abiel nor Ben-Ami cried much. Still, two goodbyes in one day is a lot, even for a fifteen year old. And then, as quickly as the day started, Ben-Ami was gone. For how long, Abiel didn't know. One thing he did know was, with his mother and father away, he was now under the care of his great uncle Joshua.

In an effort to make him feel more comfortable, Joshua spent the rest of the evening showing Abiel his home. He showed him every room in the house, including what was to be Abiel's room. But Abiel noticed something. In every room there was a wall hanging, picture or plague with an inscription on it. Abiel finally mustered up the courage and asked, "What are all these things?"

"What? These things on the wall?" Joshua asked, although he knew that is what Abiel meant.

"Yes, these *things* on the wall."

"They are part of the *Shema*."

"The what?"

"The Shema. The proclamation of Jewish Law. Moses, the servant of the Lord, instructed us to always remember the Law God gave him, which he passed on to us. *Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one,*" Joshua quoted from memory.

“These *things* that you see around my home are reminders of the Law. Moses instructed us to know and love the Law so much that it would take up residence in our hearts. He told us to never stop talking about it, practicing it, and teaching it to our children. You’ve never heard of the Shema?” Joshua asked.

“Why...no, I never have” Abiel replied timidly.

Noticing his embarrassment, Joshua reassured Abiel. “Well, that’s alright. Perhaps that’s why you are here staying with me.”

“I’m here because my parents are both away.”

“Well, that’s true, but I believe you are here for another reason. You are here to be my student. I think Yahweh would have me teach you the Shema, and the ways of God!”

Abiel didn’t know what to say.

Sensing what he was thinking, Joshua said, “You don’t have to say anything now. Just think it over. This seems like a great opportunity. You are here with me for several months at least. I am getting old...”

Getting old? Abiel thought. *He must be in his nineties. I’d say he is old.*

“...and I’ve taught many people many things,” Joshua continued. “I’ve seen first hand the blessings of following Yahweh’s Law and the devastating effects on the lives of those who don’t. It’s extremely important Abiel. It would be an honor for me to instill the wisdom of God into your life...if you are willing.”

“It *does* sound interesting.” For a long time Abiel had thought he should try to get to know God better, but didn’t really know how.

“I’ll definitely think about it.”

“That’s sounds fair. A student must be willing to learn or the teacher is simply re-telling stories to someone who’s not listening. That accomplishes nothing but boredom for the student, and frustration for the teacher.” Joshua sounded like he was speaking from experience. After thanking Joshua for the evening meal, and promising him he would think about his proposal, Abiel turned in for the night.

As he lay in bed, he couldn’t help remember his thoughts at the beginning of the day. The feeling that *today would begin a new life for him*. Nor could he forget the words of both his father and mother, encouraging him to take advantage of Joshua’s years of

wisdom and experience in the ways of people and the Law of God. His father's words, *you could learn a lot from him*, raced through Abiel's mind. His mother's counsel, *this trip will be good for you. It will be a life changing experience for you*, wouldn't leave him alone. Before he fell asleep that night, Abiel had already determined that he would indeed follow his parent's advice and learn as much as he could from his great uncle Joshua. Even though he didn't know what lay in store for him, somehow he knew that these next months would change his life forever. With that thought energizing his mind, Abiel fell asleep after a very, very long day.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 1

1. Have you ever had to face a difficult situation you didn't want to face? Did you try to get out of facing it? Once you realized it had to happen, what helped you deal with that reality?
2. One of life's biggest fears is the fear of the unknown. Why do you think this is true? Why is it so hard to deal with change?
3. Most of the time God is behind change, and He is always in the midst of change. How does knowing this help you deal with change?
4. Have you ever entered a new situation or culture and had to live by a new set of rules? How did this make you feel?
5. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-12. Why does God give us laws (in general)? See v. 2-3.
6. Have you ever thought a situation would be difficult for you but it turned out to be beneficial, or ever life changing? Explain.
7. Why is it important to teach our children the laws of God? See. V. 7-9, & 12.
8. Read Ephesians 6:4. What does Paul encourage the Ephesians to do? How?
9. Read Hebrews 12:5-11. What are the benefits of instructions and teaching?
10. What is the one requirement of receiving these blessings?
11. What does the writer of Hebrews, and Jesus tell us about those who are disciplined by God? See Revelation 3:19.

Chapter Two

A Lesson on God's Plans

“God's plans are always bigger than our plans.”

Abiel slept in late the next morning. Even though he didn't like to admit it, he *had* been tired from the long trip the day before. Abiel got dressed and hurried to the kitchen to see if there was any breakfast left for him.

“Good morning Abi!”

Abiel was taken by surprise. Not from the suddenness of the greeting, but by the greeting itself. He had never been called *Abi* before.

“Uh...good morning...Joshua.” He was starting to get used to calling him *Joshua*, but he was still taken aback that Joshua had called him *Abi*. He had mixed feelings about his new nickname. On one hand it made him feel quite young, like his father telling him he was a *young boy*. But on the other hand, it made him feel closer to Joshua – like Joshua actually *liked* him; so he decided that he didn't mind it too much.

As Abiel ate his breakfast, Joshua cleaned up the preparations. Abiel figured this was as good a time as any.

“I thought about what you said...you know, your proposal about being your student. I've decided I would like that arrangement very much. I really want to learn more about Yahweh and grow closer to Him. I'm really excited about it.”

“Wonderful. I'm delighted about it too. It's fitting, you know? *Abiel* being a student of God.”

“What do you mean?” Abiel inquired.

“Your name. Do you know what your name means?”

“No.”

“It means *My Father is God*. *Abi* means father, and *El* means God. It is fitting. Your father – not your earthly father, Ben-Ami, but your Heavenly father, Yahweh, - *is* God!

“I never knew that. I guess it was meant to be” Abiel said as he smiled.

Joshua agreed, “I guess it was.”

After breakfast Joshua explained the daily chores he wanted Abiel to do. One chore that seemed very important was to bring water to the shed every morning.

Joshua said, “Abi, every morning I need you to bring water to the work shed for me. Do you see those two clay pots? The red one and the brown one?” Abiel nodded in agreement. “Each pot is tied with a rope to each end of that long smooth tree limb. I want you to take the limb, place it on your shoulders so the pots hang down on the ropes. Then I would like you to follow the path out of the shed due east for about fifteen minutes. You’ll come to a creek. If you stay on the path, you can’t miss it.”

So far it seems pretty simple, Abiel thought.

“Once you are at the stream, fill both pots with water. Put the tree limb back on your shoulders and return the pots here to the work shed. I’ll take care of it from there. This is very important job. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I’ve got it. Get the pots, follow the path to the stream, fill the pots with water and return here” Abiel summarized.

“One more thing...I almost forgot a very important part. Abiel, listen carefully and do exactly as I say. Make sure the red pot stays on your right and the brown pot stays on your left.”

Abiel *did* listen and understood what Joshua said, but he failed to see its significance.

“When do you want me to start?” Abiel inquired.

“Right now. I’ll see you in a half an hour!”

Wanting to show Joshua he was a hard worker, Abiel got right to it. He picked up the branch, made sure the ropes were fastened to each end of it and to the two pots, placed the tree limb on his shoulders – the brown pot on his left and the red pot on his right - and headed out the door. As Abiel walked the path, it led him through a few hills and past some beautiful woods. He noticed the sky was particularly bright that morning. As his mind wandered, he was brought back to conscious thought by the sound of the stream.

Abiel reached the stream and didn't waste any time. He knelt down to the flowing water, filled up both pots, and hoisted them up on to his shoulders. The pots were considerably heavier than before, but it was not too much for him to handle. A few minutes into the return trip he found himself daydreaming again, until he noticed something. The pot on his right, the red one seemed to be getting lighter. He set it down to investigate and sure enough, there was less water in the red pot. The brown one was still full. The strange thing was, he was sure he filled both pots with the same amount of water. Each one was filled to just below the rim.

As he examined the pots further, it became clear. The red pot had a crack in it and was leaking water. But he was sure *he* did not crack the pot. It was defective when he got it. Abiel decided there was nothing he could do about it today. When he got back he would ask Joshua for a new pot, to replace the cracked one.

As he continued, the amount of water leaking out began to worry him. *By the time I get back to the work shed, all the water will be gone*, he thought. He tried to hurry, to salvage as much water as he could, but he was right. All the water in the red pot *was* gone by the time he returned to Joshua's home. Abiel did as Joshua instructed and left the pots in the shed. Joshua was nowhere to be seen so Abiel went inside the house.

A little while later Joshua came into the house and thanked Abiel for bringing the pots back. "Abiel, you did a fine job today. You did just what I asked you to do. Tomorrow I want you to do the same thing. Keep on filling the two pots and return them to me."

"But Joshua, there's something you don't know. Didn't you see what happened? That red pot is no good. It has a crack in it and all the water leaked out on the way back. Sorry, but there was nothing I could do about it. Can you replace that red pot?"

"Just follow my instructions and it will all be fine. Keep doing what you've been instructed to do" Joshua said, giving no mention to the flawed pot. Abiel didn't quite know what to think, but he agreed. To him it seemed like a waste of time and energy to fill a pot with water only to have it leak out. If he had two good pots he could give Joshua twice as much water. Or if he only had to carry one pot, perhaps he could make the trip in half the time. Any way he looked at it, it didn't make sense. His parents had told Abiel

that Joshua was a very wise man, but from this experience Abiel questioned Joshua's intelligence. *Perhaps his old age was catching up to him*, he thought.

The next day Abiel undertook the task again. He picked up the same two pots, the red one and the brown one, followed the same path to the same stream, and filled both jars. But the same thing started happening again. The water from the red pot, the one on his right began to slowly leak. The whole way back to the work shed he thought, *this is silly. It's a waste of time and effort. It would certainly accomplish more if the red pot didn't leak*. Again he hurried, but just like yesterday, all the water on his right side was gone by the time he returned. This time he was getting more frustrated about the situation and decided to confront Joshua.

"This red pot is worthless! It leaks. I really think you should replace it. The brown pot has value. It holds water just fine, but you should throw out this red one and get a new one with no cracks. One that holds water, like a pot is supposed to," Abiel scowled.

In a calming voice Joshua said, "Abiel sit down. I know all about the pots. In fact I created both of these pots and I know the red one has a crack in it."

"You did? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought you might react just as you did, and I wanted to teach you your first lesson. It's really a lesson about plans, God's plans."

"I don't understand."

"Let me explain. As I said, I made both of those pots. One day, however, I dropped the red one and put the crack in it. I guess I was a little clumsy. But since it was such a beautiful creation even with its flaw, I didn't want to throw it out. I just designed a new use for it. You said the pot was *useless* because you only saw the crack. I gave it a new purpose and now it is very useful to me. You assumed that both pots served the same purpose but in reality they now serve very different purposes.

"Abiel, on your trip to the stream, did you notice the row of flowers on the left side of the path? They were on your right side on your way back here."

"No, I didn't notice them."

“The water dripping out of the cracked red pot gave nourishment to those flowers. All living things need water to help them grow. Those flowers are used to grace my dinner table when I entertain guest and they add beauty to my home.”

Abiel understood. “I had no idea. I’m sorry for not understanding your plans. But how was I to know?”

“That’s exactly my point. Often, we don’t see the big picture. We just know a little part of it. My plans for those water pots were bigger than your understanding of the situation. That’s the way it is with God. God’s plans are always bigger than our plans. I’ve found God rarely reveals His whole plan to us all at once. He just gives us a glimpse of what we are to do next. Yet His instructions are always clear. But because we don’t see the whole plan it may seem unusual. Like allowing water to drip out of a water pot.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll try to do better and see the big picture.”

“Abi, don’t let this bother you. You’ve got nothing to be sorry about. It’s just a lesson to be learned. I had to learn it myself!”

This interested Abiel because it seemed Joshua would be the kind of person who didn’t need to learn any lessons. “How did you learn this lesson?” Abiel was not prepared for the extent of Joshua’s explanation.

“I’m glad you asked. Several years ago, just as we were entering the land of Canaan, it was occupied by many different people. But God promised to give us this land. It’s really a long story and I’ll have to tell you the details at some other time. But at the time we were to enter the land, we faced a problem. A problem so big it seemed impossible. I was leading the whole nation of Israel into this Promised Land and we had to cross the Jordan River to get here. Normally that wouldn’t be such a big problem. But at that time of year the Jordan was at flood stage. The banks were very high and the water flowed rapidly. Normally, there would be no way for a group of people, much less a whole nation, to cross that river. But God told us to take the land.

“Here is where it gets really strange. God spoke to me directly. He said that He was going to begin to exalt me among the people that very day. Then He told me to order the priests to do something that seemed very odd. No, more than odd, actually ridiculous. I gave the order for the priests who were holding the Ark of the Covenant to go and stand in the river! God seemed to be saying *go get your feet wet*. What happened next was

almost beyond belief. The plan was for the priests to wade in the water. The flow of water would then stop and the water would pile up and create a wide gap in the Jordan. Wide enough for the whole nation to cross on dry ground. Remember Abi, the river was at flood stage. It seems like a ridiculous plan, doesn't it?"

Abiel was transfixed on the story and didn't answer.

Joshua continued. "But that is what God told me would happen, and that's the order I gave, partly because I trusted Yahweh and, to be honest, partly because I simply had no other choice. But that *is* what happened. The priests waded in, the water was stopped up and the people crossed the river on dry ground. It happened exactly the way God said it would! This plan made no sense to me, but it was part of God's bigger plan to prove to all those tribes living in the land that Yahweh was with us, that He gave us this land as our inheritance and that we would drive them all from the land. That was the day I learned the lesson you learned today. God's plans are bigger than our plans. Even though we don't understand them or they seem irrational, we can trust God's plans. God is faithful! From that day on I began trusting completely in what God told me, no matter how silly it seemed.

"Just a few days later, I was put to the test, to see if I had *really* learned the lesson. Again, God told me to do something quite strange. Now I must tell you, I had been in many battles before this. It took us forty years of wandering in the Sinai Desert to get to this point, and I had developed many battle plans and won many battles. Many people considered me an expert military strategist. But I had never heard of the type of battle plan God gave me for the city of Jericho!

"God told me to have my army march around the city and not say a word. We were to do this for six days. On the seventh day we were to march around the city seven times, blow our trumpets and all bellow out a loud shout. So we did. I know, from a human perspective it doesn't seem like a wise military tactic. But remember, just a few days earlier I had learned to trust in God's plans completely. I was trusting in Yahweh's infinite might and not my own limited understanding. We, as a nation, had a clear word from God, and we believed Him. We acted in complete faith, and did it His way. And God gave us the victory!"

"But how can I develop the faith to trust God completely?" Abiel asked.

“One thing I have learned is that knowing God’s Law helps build faith. When God called me to lead the nation of Israel into the Promised Land, He was very clear. He gave me what I like to call, *conditions for success*. He told me to be careful to do everything according to the Law. Everything! I was not to take the slightest turn to one side or the other. I was to follow His decrees exactly. And not only that, I was to always keep talking about the Law and teaching the Law. It was to be the primary topic of conversation. This is one reason I’m glad you agreed to be my student. I can continue to teach His ways. God told me I was to meditate on His counsel day and night. Meditation simply means focused thinking. I was not to just read the Law but I was to *think on* it also. Mull it over in my mind and see how it applies to everyday affairs. And I was not just to think about it, but I was to *do it* as well. We can think all we want, but if we don’t do what His word says, our faith is empty.

“Abiel, I’m telling you these things because they still apply. They pertain the same today as they did years ago. The principles apply to you as well as to me. God told me very clearly that if I did those things, then I would have victory where ever I went and would be prosperous and successful. Do you understand what I am telling you Abi?”

“Yes I think so. If I’m going to be successful in life I must understand the Law of God and review it regularly. I must practice God’s ways personally and publicly. I must talk about His Law the same way you instructed the nation of Israel about God’s Laws. And knowing God’s Law helps build faith. I’ve also learned that total obedience brings God’s favor, and that His plans are bigger than mine, and that I should follow them even if they don’t make sense to me because Yahweh is incredibly wise, and I am merely a young boy...I mean a young man, who is learning the ways of God.”

“Abi, you’ve learned a lot today. I’m proud of you” Joshua said with a smile.

Abiel said nothing, but smiled as well.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 2

1. In Jewish culture as well as in Biblical times, names and their meanings were very significant. Do you know the meaning of your name? If so, what is it? Do you tend to emulate the character qualities associated with your name?
2. Read Philemon 1:10-11. A former slave and helper of Paul – Onesimus’ name meant “useful”. Some tools seem “useless” when we don’t know how to use them correctly, yet they are very “useful” when used in the right way. Have you ever used something in the wrong way and later discovered the proper use for it? Was it more useful when used properly?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. God often uses what the world sees as foolish to accomplish His purposes. God sometimes “makes beautiful” something or someone that the world sees as flawed or useless. Can you give an example of this? Why do you think God does this?
4. Have you ever been so close to a situation that you could not see above the circumstances and not see the “big picture”? Explain.
5. Have you ever faced a problem so big, it seemed impossible? What was it? How does simple obedience – taking one step at a time – help in obeying God’s seemingly strange requests?
6. Have you ever been in an airplane, sitting on the runway, looking out the window? What did you see? Thirty seconds after takeoff, what do you now see out that same window? What makes the difference? Once we see God’s plans from a higher perspective, do they seem silly or impossible? See 1 Corinthians 2:16. How does having the “mind of Christ” help us face difficult situations?

7. How does reading God’s word help us have the “mind of Christ”? How does it help, in general?
8. See Romans 10:7 and James 2:17. How are reading, hearing, meditating and doing God’s word tied together?
9. See Joshua 1:7-8. What were God’s “Conditions for Success” to Joshua? Do they still apply today?

Chapter Three

A Lesson on Attitude

“Attitude affects everything we do.”

Abiel spent the next week trying to remember and put into practice the lessons he learned about God’s plans being bigger than his own. He had several opportunities during the week to trust God even though he didn’t understand it all or see the big picture. Little did Abiel know that the next lesson he would learn would be one that he could apply every day of his life.

After a long day of doing daily chores and other various errands for Joshua, Abiel was feeling tired and a little irritable. Joshua called him in for dinner, and as he entered the house he smelled the aroma of fish.

“Fish again?” Abiel groaned. Joshua had prepared fish for yesterday’s evening meal and again for lunch a few days earlier. Abiel thought *isn’t there anything else to eat around here but fish?* He realized that verbalizing that thought would not accomplish much, so he decided to tone it down a bit.

“I see we’re having fish again Joshua. I’m sorry, but to be honest, I’m getting tired of fish. This is the third time this week we’ve had it. Is there something else I can eat tonight?” Abiel said with more force than he had intended to.

“Do I sense a little grumbling and complaining in your voice?” Joshua asked fully knowing Abiel was in a bad mood. He asked it because he was about to make a point and teach Abiel another lesson.

“Yes, I guess I *am* complaining, but I’m tired of eating fish” Abiel said, more reserved this time.

“Well, I’m glad.”

“You’re glad that I’m tired of fish, or glad that I’m complaining?” Abiel asked.

“No, no, Abi! I’m not happy that your attitude is spoiling your meal, but I *am* glad this situation has arisen. I believe I can teach you much about your attitude. About grumbling and complaining. Are you ready for another lesson?”

“Sure, I guess so,” Abiel shrugged.

“Fine. Let me tell you something Abi. One of the most important lessons I have learned in my life has to do with attitude.” This grabbed Abiel’s attention. “Maintaining a good attitude takes constant effort. It takes daily work. It’s extremely important because attitude affects everything we do. I’ve found that optimism is the one quality more associated with happiness than any other. Your attitude is as important as your experience or ability. A positive attitude will allow you to use your skills, training and experiences in a more effective manner. Generally speaking, positive thinking will let you do everything better than negative thinking will. I’ve found it is important to maintain a good attitude in three areas.”

“What are they?” Abiel asked.

“I’m glad you asked. They are your approach towards your life circumstances, your thoughts about God, and your way of thinking about others. I learned a valuable lesson on grumbling about circumstances many years ago, back before you were born. You see, before we settled in this land your ancestors were slaves in Egypt. It was a very hard life. Pharaoh was cruel to us. But God heard the cries of His people and He instructed Moses, the servant of the Lord, to tell Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go free. Through many miraculous events God gave us our freedom and Moses led us out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, to this Promised Land of Canaan where we live to this day.

“But as we began our trip to the Promised Land, the people started to complain. They protested about not having water to drink, but God miraculously provided water. Then they grumbled because they were hungry. They actually said they’d rather be back living as slaves in Egypt than to die there in the desert. But God heard their complaining and in His mercy He provided bread from Heaven called *manna* for us to eat each day. Each morning we were to gather only enough manna for our families to eat for that day. On the day before the Sabbath, we were to gather twice as much, enough for that day and the next. But some people didn’t trust God and gathered more than one days worth of manna, stockpiling it. Do you know what happened to it?”

“No,” Abiel replied.

“The manna that was saved up got rotten and began to smell. It was infested with maggots. God caused it to be worthless to teach us to daily trust in Him and not in our own strength. I learned many things related to manna. First, God hears us and provides

for us. Even though our people were complaining, God heard our cries and gave us the manna. I also learned that discontent can distort our perspective. Because the people were hungry they forgot about the brutality of the slave masters in Egypt and wanted to go back. We'd been in bondage to them for four hundred years, and now because of a few hunger pains they wanted to return to that miserable life of slavery. You see Abiel, dissatisfaction can alter our view of how bad our present circumstances are and make us remember the past more fondly than it actually was.

“The next thing I learned was that even though God provides for His children, He doesn't always give us the things we want in the way we want them” Joshua continued. “He certainly wanted to give us food to nourish us, but we quickly began to grumble because all we had to eat was the manna. We ate manna everyday for forty years! And you thought having fish a few times in one week was bad. We got really tired of manna. The people longed for the meat, leeks and onions they had back in Egypt. So they continued to grumble against Moses. Sound familiar?”

“Ok, I get it. I'm sorry about the grumbling. What else happened?”

“Well I learned that God provides for our needs, but He often does it one day at a time so we can stay dependant on Him. I also learned that there's more to life than material things and physical food. If we miss out on a relationship with the living God, we miss out on what life is *really* all about. It's not just about food and satisfying our cravings. Yes, sometimes we get physically hungry, but God's presence nourishes us spiritually, in a way food never could. People don't survive on bread alone, but on the words of God. Above all Abiel, God desires that we truly know Him and walk with Him and trust Him for our provisions day by day all of our lives.

“I also learned that sin stinks! Remember those people who did it their own way and didn't have faith that God would provide the manna each day? They didn't trust Yahweh with their futures. The extra manna they gathered got rotten and began to stink. We could all smell it, and it was a vivid picture of the nature of sin and disobedience. The result of sin is death, destruction and decay. Those people didn't remember that God's mercy is new every morning and His faithfulness to us is great. You see Abi, we have a God who loves us, and He only puts us through trails to cause our faith in Him to grow.

“Can you see how people might get a bad attitude about their circumstances? Abi, you were in a bad mood earlier because you were upset about the fish. Most emotions are determined simply by how you interpret your circumstances. You can’t control the conditions in your life, but you *can* control your attitude towards those conditions. It’s not what happens to you that determines how far you will go in life, it is how you handle what happens to you.”

“I guess I could have handled the situation better and been thankful that we had something to eat,” Abi said.

“You’re catching on Abi! Attitude is also crucial in the way we think about God. Do you remember the story I told you about our people crossing the Jordan River on dry ground to enter this land?”

“Of course I do.” Abiel felt another long story coming on.

“Well I need to tell you the significance of the Ark of the Covenant. The priests carried the Ark and it represented the presence of God. When we saw the Ark, it was a physical reminder that Yahweh was with us. The morning we were to go into the Promised Land, I gave my chief officers very particular instructions that they relayed to the people. I chose my words very carefully because I wanted to make sure the people maintained a proper attitude towards God in this crucial time in the history of our nation. I told them ‘When you *see* the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God...’ Basically I was telling them to watch for God. Abiel, we need to watch for God’s leading in everything we do. Had the people not been watching for the Ark, they wouldn’t have known where to go. The same applies to us. We need to keep our eyes focused on our Creator so we can navigate the flood waters of life. Then I told them to ‘...*move out* from your positions and follow the Ark.’ I was telling them to go after God. When we see God moving out we need to pursue Him, even if it seems like an impossible task. You already learned about having faith in His plans even when they seem silly, right?”

“Right!” Abiel was pleased that Joshua had recognized that he had learned the first of Joshua’s lessons.

“Then I told them ‘*keep a distance* of two thousand cubits between you and the Ark. *Do not go near it.*’ I was reminding them to honor God. Even though God is very loving and is concerned with our everyday lives, He is also holy and righteous. He is

blameless and upright, and we need to maintain a proper attitude of respect and awe towards Him. Abi, we need to honor God in all we do, because He is a God worthy of honor, glory and praise.”

“I’m beginning to realize that more and more Joshua. I sure am learning a lot today. You’ve told me about maintaining a good attitude about circumstances and towards God. What about my attitude toward others?” Abiel asked.

“I’m glad you asked. When you choose to be pleasant and positive to others, generally, they will be kind to you in return. I’ve found that the way you treat others determines the way they treat you. Have you ever seen someone do something unkind to someone and then you develop a bad attitude towards them because of it?” Joshua inquired.

“Sure. One time I saw a boy from my village being real mean to his sister. I yelled at him and then I ran away. He was bigger than I was and he has a terrible temper. Right then and there I thought he was not a nice boy. I still feel that way to this day,” Abiel answered.

“It’s easy to develop a bad attitude towards a person in a situation like that. Remember though, you can disagree with someone without being disagreeable. To respond is positive. To react is negative. It’s all about your attitude towards others,” Joshua advised.

“I guess I could have handled the situation better,” Abiel conceded.

“Abiel, when you see someone doing something you think they shouldn’t, I want you to remember three things. First, you don’t know the circumstances in their life that led to that action. Maybe that boy’s father was abusive to him. That doesn’t excuse the boy’s actions, but sins are often passed on from father to son, and that would explain some things. Second, you don’t know if they are in the process of dealing with that action. Maybe that boy has been working very hard on his temper, and has been making lots of progress controlling his anger. On the day you saw the incident, he may have just slipped. He may have apologized to his sister shortly afterwards and asked for her forgiveness.”

“I sure hope he did” Abiel said sincerely.

“I hope so too. The last thing to remember is that people can change. God is in the process of conforming us to His image. I must tell you the story of Rahab. I need to tell you of her shady past. She used to be a prostitute in Jericho. Her home was in the wall of the city. She didn’t follow God nor honor Him. Spiritually, she was lost. But as the stories of the miracles of God and His favor toward us spread throughout the land of Canaan, she heard these stories and believed them. She knew that Yahweh had given the land to us and she put her faith in Him. Before we attacked I sent two spies into the land, to scout out the region, and they stayed with Rahab. Because of her new faith in Yahweh, she helped the spies. The king of Jericho sent word to Rahab to hand over the spies, but she hid them and sent the king’s messengers away looking for them in the wrong direction. Her actions proved that she loved God and wanted to be a part of His purposes. She was also concerned for her family. She knew Jericho would be wiped out so she made the spies promise that the soldiers would leave her and her family alone and let them live. The spies agreed. You remember the story, don’t you? As we blew our trumpets that seventh day, the walls of Jericho came crashing down. Now remember, Rahab’s house was *in* the wall of the city! Yet, God protected her. She is still alive today and doesn’t live too far from here. Perhaps you can meet here someday.”

“I’d enjoy that,” Abiel replied.

“We can learn a lot from Rahab. People can change. A new beginning with God leads to many things. It leads to a new life. God spared her life. It leads to a new family. Once we conquered the land, we treated Rahab as one of us and adopted her into our family. A new life with God leads to freedom. She left her former business and is now a baker. She makes wonderful breads and is known throughout the region for her baked goods. But she’s also known for her faith. A new relationship with God can bring fame. People all over this region know her story and her faith and heroism. In fact, I believe her story will be told throughout history and she’ll be remembered with all the men and women of great faith. Well, what have you learned this evening, Abi?”

“I’ve learned a lot. First, I learned I need to maintain a good attitude in the circumstances of my life. God hears my cries and provides for me but He often uses His provisions to test me to see if I’ll trust Him. And sin stinks. Doing things my own way leads to destruction. Next I learned to maintain a right attitude about God. To watch for

Him, follow Him and honor Him, because He is worthy of honor. Finally, I learned to keep a good outlook towards other people. I shouldn't be quick to judge others and apply blame when I don't know the circumstances of their lives or what they are working through. And people can change! I know I'm changing. Joshua, thank you for teaching me these lessons. I really appreciate it."

"You're welcome Abi. That's what I'm here for."

Joshua and Abiel finished their meal of fish, and Abiel didn't complain about it or even notice the fact that he was eating fish again throughout the entire conversation.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 3

1. What are some things that irritate you? Why do you think they bother you?
2. Attitude is important. How you view the world affects everything you do. Would you say you typically see the glass “half empty” or “half full”?
3. Sometimes the negative aspects of struggles we go through overshadow God’s goodness, and we forget all of His blessings. The practice of “counting your blessings can help us combat this. Count five blessings in your life right now and share them with the other members of your group. How can this exercise help your attitude?
4. Why is it often easier to trust in ourselves than to trust in God?
5. What three things did Joshua learn from God about manna?
6. Has God ever answered your prayer differently than you expected? How did it turn out for you? Why do you think He answered it in the way He did?
7. Has God ever provided for you progressively – one day at a time? Why do you think He did it that way?
8. See Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, John 6:35 and Lamentations 3:22. What do these verses tell you about God’s faithfulness to you?
9. Have you ever been in a situation where the circumstances were suddenly out of your control? How did that make you feel? How could a good attitude help in a situation like that? How could Jesus’ example in Hebrews 12:2 help you deal with a situation that is uncomfortable or out of your control?

10. Have you ever been mad at God, or had a bad attitude towards Him? Think about the circumstances that led to that attitude.
11. Have you ever sensed God guiding hand on your life? Explain. Why did you get the sense that God was leading you?
12. What three principles did Joshua teach the children of Israel about God, from the lesson of the Ark?
13. Often, one of our biggest frustrations in life deals with other people. Why do you think this is true?
14. What three pieces of advice does Joshua give regarding your attitude towards someone else's sin? How might these things be helpful in us not judging others?
15. Have you ever noticed how you've changed or grown spiritually since becoming a Christian? How have you grown?
16. What is the main thing we learn from Rahab, in this chapter?
17. What four things does God give us, as He changes us, according to this chapter?

Chapter Four

A Lesson About Sin

“One person’s sin affects the whole community.”

It had been several weeks since Joshua taught Abiel about the importance of a good attitude, and Abiel hadn’t complained much since he learned his last lesson. Abiel stayed busy doing chores for Joshua without complaining as well as spending some time playing with other boys in the nearby villages. He was making some new friends and fitting in quite well in his new surroundings.

One afternoon, as Joshua was looking through his collection of weapons he had collected over the years from the many battles he had fought, he noticed one of his knives was missing. Later that evening he called Abiel in from a day of playing with his friends. “Abiel, I want you to come inside. I have something to discuss with you.”

Abiel came in right away and asked, “What is it Joshua?”

“Abiel, I was looking through my collection of weapons and I noticed one of my knives is missing. Do you know what happened to it?” Joshua probed.

“Ah...well, not exactly,” Abiel mumbled, his eyes cast downward.

“Abiel, look at me. I want you to tell me the truth. Do you know what happened to the knife?”

“Yes, I know what happened to it,” Abiel conceded. “I borrowed it and gave it to my new friend Zared. It was for a good reason though. We were looking at your collection of knives several days ago and he really liked one in particular. A few days later we were playing and he mentioned the knife again. He said ‘that knife could carve a beautiful statue for my mother. I’ve been working on a gift for her but my knife isn’t nearly as sharp as your Grand Uncle’s.’ Then he showed me his dull knife and the piece of wood he was working on for his mother. He asked me to get him the knife but warned me not to tell you about it because he knew you wouldn’t allow it. So I borrowed it and gave it to him. He said he would return it as soon as he was finished carving the statue for his mother. I figured it was not important to tell you about it since you have so many knives. I didn’t think you’d notice.”

“Stealing is a very serious issue Abiel...”

“Wait a moment, I didn’t steal anything. I just borrowed the knife as a favor for a friend. I think you’re over reacting,” Abiel interrupted.

“Did you ask me if you could take the knife?” Joshua asked, fully knowing the answer.

“Well not exactly. No, I didn’t.”

“Abiel, taking something that doesn’t belong to you without asking is stealing, no matter what the circumstances are; and not telling the whole truth is lying.” Abiel could sense he was about to learn another lesson. “All sin is serious. Remember Abiel, we are not to depart from God’s Law the slightest bit. There are no *big* sins or *small* sins. Sin is sin. Let me tell you about a lesson I learned first hand of the seriousness of sin.”

Abiel was right. He knew he was going to learn another lesson, but he figured it’s better to learn a lesson from Joshua about sin than it is to be scolded and punished for sin.

“Do you remember the story I told you about the fall of Jericho?” Joshua asked.

“Yes.”

“When an army conquers a city, the normal custom is to allow the soldiers to take plunder, or spoils of war; any goods from that city or weapons from the battlefield. You’ve seen my collection of weapons and knives from battles, haven’t you Abiel?”

“Yes,” Abiel said quietly, knowing what Joshua was implying.

Joshua continued. “Because Jericho was the first city in the Promised Land that God gave us, He wanted everything in that city to be destroyed - totally devoted to Him, as a sign of His holiness. Those instructions were clearly communicated to all the people. But one man, Achan, disobeyed those orders and caused calamity to fall on all of us. Because of his sin, we lost our next battle as we tried to overtake the city of Ai.”

“How did just one man’s disobedience affect the whole nation?” Abiel asked.

“That’s the nature of sin Abiel. One person’s sin affects the whole community. Sin is painful. It causes destruction all around. Just as a sore causes pain on the body, if it is not taken care of it can spread infection to other parts of the body and cause overwhelming ruin. I remember the pain of the experience with Achan like it was yesterday. It was a very difficult lesson for us to learn, but God often uses painful events in our lives to teach us important lessons. Not because He wants us to suffer, but for our

own good. Ai was a painful defeat. We expected to march in and overtake them with ease. But we were chased down and thirty six of our soldiers died that day. I couldn't figure out why. Then we made a painful discovery. We learned that Achan had taken some of the devoted things and hid them in his tent. He violated Yahweh's covenant! As a result of his actions, he suffered a painful death. We certainly didn't like doing it, and I don't like to talk about it, but it's important to remember the seriousness of sin, Abiel. Achan and his whole family were put to death as a result of his sin. His sin affected his whole family as well as our entire nation. Achan serves as a grave reminder of the seriousness of sin."

"I never thought much about sin before," Abiel said.

"We can learn a lot from others sins. I'd rather learn from the errors of other people than to learn from my own mistakes. There is an age-old pattern to sin. It follows four steps. When someone sins, first he sees, then he covets, then he takes, and last he hides. Achan saw the plunder, he coveted it, he took it and hid it in his tent. The same was true of Adam and Eve. They saw the fruit God told them not to eat, they desired it and ate it, and then tried to hide from God. The same pattern happened with you and your friend. Zared saw the knife, and wanted it. You took it for him and then hid that fact from me. Do you see how it works?" Joshua asked.

"Yes I see."

"Let me tell you how God deals with sin. First of all, God knows our sin. We can't hide anything from an omniscient God, because He sees all. He knew it was Achan who had sinned, but we needed to learn the lesson as well. Abiel, God hates sin. Because He is perfect He can not tolerate anything less than perfection," Joshua continued.

"That's a pretty high standard. How can any of us be justified in His sight if He demands perfection? It would seem that all people sin and don't live up to that standard," Abiel inquired.

"Yes, you are right Abi. But God made a way. He provided a sacrifice. Every year the High Priest makes an atoning sacrifice for us by putting to death a spotless lamb. That lamb's blood is sprinkled over all the people and covers our sins. It is a wonderful reminder of how the Angel of Death passed over all the homes of the Hebrew people who had sprinkled the blood of a goat on their doorposts while we were slaves in Egypt; but

that's another story all together. Abiel, I believe God will bring about a fulfillment of this sacrificial system, where a Savior will make one sacrifice for all and not only cover our sins but take them away. But until that happens, we can trust in God's provision for the forgiveness of our sins. But you must also understand that God will punish unforgiven sin, just like in Achan's case. Unforgiven sin must be dealt with because sin hinders God's work. Achan's sin detoured God's plans for victory over Ai. Do you remember I said Achan tried to hide his sin by putting it under his tent? Here's another lesson Abiel. You can't hide sin for long. The nature of sin is that it will be brought to light. Darkness cannot remain when light is cast upon it. Sin will be exposed for all to see. Achan's sin was discovered. We all saw it. And Achan and his family were destroyed as a result of his sin. Remember, one person's sin affects many people. The truly sad thing is that if Achan had been patient and trusted God, he could have had all the plunder he desired. Once the sin was taken care of, like getting rid of an infectious sore, God continued to bless us. We conquered the city of Ai just a few days after Achan's death and God told us we could take all the plunder we wanted. In fact, the knife you 'borrowed' from me was one I took from the battlefield of Ai."

"That's a great story Joshua but I still think that Zared deserves most of the blame. He was the one who put me up to taking the knife," Abiel said.

"I want to talk to you about your new friend Zared. I know this boy and he is a trouble maker. Abiel, there's something I haven't told you. After I discovered the knife was missing, I asked around. I found out that it was Zared who had used my knife to kill our neighbor's goat. His name fits him as well. Zared mean *ambush*, and I think he ambushed you into doing something you shouldn't have done. Abi, you need to learn that picking your friends is very important. Associating with good people can have a positive effect on you, but socializing with troublesome boys can be harmful and can get you into trouble. I learned that associating with the enemy can have disastrous effects shortly after we conquered Ai.

"Early in our campaign to conquer Canaan, we mostly fought against cities that had kings. But there was a group of people from the nearby city of Gibeon who had no king. The people made decisions for themselves. Now it's a little embarrassing to tell you this, but it's the truth and it's an important lesson, so I will. These Gibeonites tricked us.

We associated too closely with them and it cost us in the end. One day they sent out a delegation of men to us. They wore old and patched clothing, had worn out sacks and old and cracked wine skins. We tasted their old, moldy food and dry bread. They said, ‘we are from a great distance away, yet we have heard how powerful Yahweh is and we wish to make a treaty with you.’ But Moses clearly told us not to make a treaty with anyone in the land. We were tricked into thinking they were from a far away country, so we promised them we wouldn’t harm them and all our leaders authorized it with an oath. A few days later we learned that they were actually our neighbors who lived close to us.”

“So what happened?” Abiel asked.

“I’m glad you asked,” Joshua replied. Abiel was quickly learning that every time he asked *what happened*, Joshua would say *I’m glad you asked*, and it would lead to another long explanation.

“Because of the oath, we could not attack them. We had to honor the promise we made to them even if they tricked us into making it. These Gibeonites were not to be trusted. I’ve learned that the enemy can be deceptive! He can use deceptive strategies. They had planned this hoax for a long time. The enemy uses deceptive supplies. All their goods were made to look as if they were old and had been on a long journey. The enemy can use deceptive speech as well. The whole story they told us, from beginning to end, was a lie invented to save their skin. The same is true of your friend Zared. Several days ago he planned a deception to trick you into giving him my knife. He told you a lie about wanting to carve a statue for his mother. He even showed you a dull knife and a piece of wood to back up his story, just like the Gibeonites did to us.”

“Yes, and I believed him just as you believed the Gibeonites,” Abiel admitted.

“The enemy can also be disruptive. They disrupted our ability to see clearly. Had we looked closer at their clothes we may have discovered the ruse. Our ability to seek council was also disrupted. Our biggest mistake was that we did not inquire of the Lord what we were to do. As a result of being taken in by the Gibeonites, our ability to stay compliant with God’s Law was disrupted. It was the same with you today Abiel. You couldn’t see the truth behind Zared’s lie. You didn’t ask for guidance and you strayed into sin.”

“You’re right. I didn’t ask for guidance and I *did* sin,” Abiel confessed.

“One more thing I’ve learned is that the enemy can be defeated. They can be confronted. Once we were on to them we didn’t delay, but went right to them and met them face to face. We spoke the truth to them and told them because of their trick, they would have to be our servants from that time onward. They were to serve us as wood cutters and water carriers. I learned that the enemy can be cursed. We must deal with deception head on. We have the ability to speak a blessing or a curse to people based on the authority of God. And sin can be controlled. Moses made a provision for cases such as these. He instructed us that if we approached a city and its people made an offer of peace, we would let them live but subject them to forced labor, as a way to control them. And since sin must be atoned for, this will be your fate Abiel,” Joshua said in a much more serious tone.

Oh no! Abiel thought.

“I have spoken to Zared’s parents and beginning tomorrow morning, for two weeks, he will accompany you in one hour of extra chores here, to pay the penalty for you stealing the knife, and two hours of extra chores at the neighbors for him killing the goat. Remember, one person’s sin affects the whole community.”

As Abiel signed, he realized that the punishment was probably fair, and even though he was not looking forward to the extra chores, he felt he would have no problem remembering the lessons he had learned that day about the seriousness of sin.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 4

1. Can you think of an example where one person's sin can affect others? Explain.
2. In what way is sin painful?
3. In Joshua's retelling of the story of Achan, why did Achan meet with such dire consequences for his sin? What lesson does Achan teach us?
4. What four step pattern did Joshua say sin follows? Can you think of other examples of this truth?
5. How does it make you feel that God knows your sin? How can that fact challenge us to walk in holiness?
6. Read Hebrews 7:27, 9:12-14. What are the main differences between the High Priest's yearly sacrifice of a lamb, and Christ's ("the Lamb of God") sacrifice?
7. Joshua tells Abiel that "unforgiven sin must be dealt with because sin hinders God's work." How does sin hinder God's work?
8. How can associating too closely with evil have a negative effect on a person?
9. Have you ever been deceived into making a decision you later regretted? Explain.
10. Have you ever had to "pay a penalty" for your sin in a practical way? Explain.

Chapter Five

A Lesson About Courage

“God gives courage and provides the tools we need to do the job.”

The next two weeks, Abiel and his friend Zared worked an extra hour everyday for Joshua and then two hours at the neighbors, in payment for their past misdeeds, although Abiel was considering Zared less of a friend each day. He was determined not to have anything to do with Zared in the future, realizing what a bad influence he had been on him in the short time they had known each other. Abiel also had plenty of time to think about the lessons Joshua taught him about sin and being too close to the enemy. As he worked, he thought about how much God hates sin and that we can't hide our sin from an all-knowing God. He realized how serious sin is because it affects others as well as oneself - that sin leads to pain, hinders God's work and must be dealt with. His extra daily chores were a clear reminder of that. He also thought about God's provision for sin – the blood of a goat or lamb as payment. He was thankful that his sins were covered by this blood.

Abiel's next lesson would be one he wasn't ready to learn, but would also prove to be something valuable as he faced difficult situations in the future. Joshua called Abiel and told him he had an important task for him to do.

“Some of my sheep have gotten out of their pen and wandered off. They've done this several times before and it is quite important yet dangerous to round them up and bring them back to safety. They are in danger from wild animals and also from themselves. Sheep tend to not watch where they are going and often wander into danger. I'm sending you to round up the lost sheep Abiel. This is a serious assignment and it will take courage,” Joshua said soberly.

“I'll be honest. I'm a little afraid, Joshua. I've never done anything like this before. Wild animals? I don't know. I don't think I have much courage...or any courage for that matter,” Abiel said truthfully.

“Courage is not the lack of fear, Abi. Courage and fear often walk side by side. Courage is simply fear that has said its prayers,” Joshua said.

“That’s easy for you to say. You’re a great man. You’ve been a great general and have lots of courage.”

“That may be true, but it wasn’t always that way. In reality, I started out as just an ordinary young man who loved God. I wasn’t anyone special but God granted me courage to do the things He had planned for me. I’ve dealt with fear, but Abiel, the history of the human race is the history of ordinary people who have overcome their fears and accomplished extraordinary things. God wants us to step out in faith and take risks. If you are not willing to risk the extraordinary, you will have to settle for the ordinary in life.

“Let me tell you the story of when I needed a great deal of courage. Just after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, God told me I was to lead the entire nation into the Promised Land. Granted, I *was* a skilled military man but I had no experience as a national leader. I was afraid and lacked the bravery needed for such an important task. But God told me that He would give us every place we set our feet and He commanded me to be strong and courageous. This was the same message Moses encouraged me with before his death. He was preparing me for my new role. But this time I heard it straight from Yahweh! God Himself commanded it, but I still felt afraid. You see, I knew first hand the kind of people that occupied the land. Years before, Moses sent twelve of us to spy out the land. I was one of those spies. We saw giants and large fortified cities that gave us great concern. In fact, ten of the spies told the people the odds were against us and that it was too risky to try to conquer the land. But even though Caleb and I saw the same impenetrable cities and giants, we knew that this land was our inheritance and we told the people that we should certainly go in and take possession of it.

“But that was forty years earlier. Now it seemed a little different. Now *I* was the newly appointed leader, and I felt I could never live up to Moses’ reputation. The people had just spent thirty days weeping and mourning over his death. Moses was the greatest prophet the world had known. God knew him face to face and up until that time I had heard God’s audible voice only once.

“Abiel, I felt ill-equipped then just as you do today. But God told me something else. He commanded us to get our supplies ready before we crossed the Jordan River. As we gathered the materials and equipment we needed to enter the Promised Land, I started

thinking about all the supplies God had already given us on our journey so far. Here I was, worried I didn't have what it would take to lead the people, yet God already prepared me personally with all I needed, and He prepared our people corporately with what they needed. You see Abiel, God never gives a person a task to do without first giving him the resources, guidelines and help to accomplish it. I believe you already have every characteristic necessary for success in life if you just recognize, develop and use them."

"I don't understand," Abiel said.

"Let me explain further. God had given us all we needed in the wilderness up until that point. The main thing I want to tell you about is the Ark of the Covenant. This was the physical manifestation of the holy presence of God. Whenever we saw the Ark, we knew Yahweh was with us. In the Ark were three reminders of God's presence. First there was a bowl of manna to remind us of his provision. There was also Aaron's rod. Aaron was the High Priest during the time we were in the wilderness and his rod reminded us to come near to God in worship. Finally, the Ark contained the two tablets of God's ten commandments which reminded us to come near to him with an obedient heart."

"What other kind of resources did God provide you with?" Abiel asked.

"God gave us the help we needed to interpret his will. After Aaron's death, Eleazar became the High Priest and God told Moses that I could seek Eleazar's counsel in obtaining decisions. He also gave us the Law to follow. There is no more clear revelation of His will than that! So we had all the resources we needed in our journey to the Promised Land. You see, God gives courage and provides the tools we need to do the job. That is why I'm giving you the equipment you'll need for this important task Abi," Joshua said with a smile.

"You are giving me what I'll need? What is it?" Abiel asked.

"First of all I'm giving you a map to follow so you don't get lost. I'll point out exactly where to go. Next, I'll send with some valuable resources for you to use. You'll need some food because this could be a long undertaking. You will also need this pan and a stick." Joshua gave Abiel a pan and picked up a short stick and handed it to him.

"What are these for?" Abiel asked.

“If you see any wild animals endangering the sheep I want you to pound the stick on the pan to scare them away. It usually works every time.”

Usually? Abiel thought. He decided not to ask what happened if it didn't work.

“Finally and most important, I'm sending Cholo with you .Here boy!” Joshua shouted. Joshua's large sheep dog ran up to them and greeted Abiel by licking his hand. “Cholo has gathered my wayward sheep many times in the past and he knows what to do. I have complete confidence in him - and in you as well. Abiel, it looks like you've got all you need. Do you have any questions?”

“No. I guess not. I'll be on my way then,” Abiel said hesitantly.

Abiel made sure he had all he needed and set out with his supplies and the dog to gather the wayward sheep. As he went he tried to remember all that Joshua said about using the supplies he had given him, and about being courageous. As Abiel followed the map it brought him right to the gate where the sheep had escaped. Abiel saw the gate was broken and the sheep had escaped through it. He looked over and saw a deep ravine and listened carefully. Just as he heard the bleating of sheep coming from the gully, Cholo raced towards the sound. Abiel followed as fast as he could. As he approached the ravine he saw Cholo racing around and chasing the lost sheep together in a group, but Abiel sensed something in the air. By instinct he turned to his left and saw a mountain lion hiding behind a tree. As it began to prowl, fear gripped Abiel's heart. Yet at the same time, he remembered what Joshua had said about courage. *God gives courage and provides the tools we need to do the job.* He remembered the pan and stick Joshua give him and concluded now was the time to use them. Abiel grabbed the stick and started to pound on the pan. *Clank, clank, clank.* He decided to shout too. *Haa, haa!* And just as Joshua said, the mountain lion heard the noise and turned his head. He then looked at Abiel and ran off.

After the lion was gone Abiel thought about the danger he had been in. His heart began to race when he thought of the danger - to himself and to the sheep - that he had avoided. But he also felt great about the courage God had just given him and the fact that following Joshua's instructions had paid off.

Soon Cholo was finished rounding up the sheep. They simply followed the dog and the dog followed Abiel back to the sheep pen. Abiel spent some time fixing the gate

while allowing the sheep to graze on some fresh grass. When he finished fixing the gate, he secured the sheep inside, said good bye to them, and he and Cholo headed back to Joshua's home.

As Abiel and Cholo approached Joshua's home, Joshua was in the yard as Cholo ran ahead and greeted Joshua in his usual fashion - licking his hand.

"Yes boy. I'm glad to see you too Cholo! Abi, how did it go? Did you find the sheep?" Joshua cried.

"Yes," Abiel shouted, unable to contain his excitement. "Everything went exactly as you said it would. I followed the map and found the sheep fence. The gate was broken so I fixed it. Cholo found the sheep wandering near a ravine and immediately rounded them up!"

"Excellent job, Abi! I must ask you though, were you scared?"

"Well, yes I was," Abiel admitted. "I had to use the stick and the pan to create noise - but it worked perfectly! As I was pounding and making a racket I felt courage well up inside me. It felt like God was giving me an extra gift of courage right when I needed it! Actually, I was more frightened after it was all over, when I thought about the danger I had been in."

"A timid person is someone who is frightened before they see danger. A coward is afraid during the time of danger, but a courageous person is only afraid after the threat is past! I've often thought courage is the ability to let no one know you are scared to death. When you faced fear today, you didn't let that mountain lion know you were afraid. You stood up to it, pounded on that pan and scared it away!" Joshua exclaimed.

"How did you know it was a mountain lion?" Abiel asked.

"What?" Joshua said, confused.

"I said *how did you know it was a mountain lion?* I never mentioned what kind of animal I scared away."

"Abiel, I have something to tell you," Joshua admitted. "I secretly followed you on your journey to make sure you didn't get lost, to assure your safety and to guarantee the sheep would be rounded up. I was near by the entire time watching over you."

"Like God was near the people of Israel through his presence in the Ark of the covenant?" Abiel added.

“Yes, just like that. I didn’t mean to question your ability. I just wanted to protect you, because I love you,” Joshua said sincerely.

“But I don’t understand. When you saw I was in danger, why didn’t you help me?” Abiel asked.

“Abi, you are a very gifted young man, full of potential to do almost anything. But *you* are the only one who can use your abilities. I can’t do it for you. The two greatest things that overcome fear are knowledge and action. You knew what you were to do and you took action. And through that, you overcame your fear!”

“I guess I have learned a lot about courage through this experience,” Abiel said, not wanting his lesson to be over. He encouraged Joshua to continue, knowing his next question would bring another story. “Have you ever been discouraged?”

“Have I ever been discouraged?” I’m glad you asked! I’ve been discouraged plenty of times. Just because I was a general and leader of a nation doesn’t mean I didn’t get discouraged. Leaders are prone to discouragement but they must learn to discipline their disappointments. It is not what happens to us that matters, it is what we choose to do about what happens that makes the difference in how our lives turn out. That is a lesson I learned after the defeat in the first battle for Ai.

“We all make mistakes, and mistakes lead to discouragement. I made many mistakes before the battle that day. First of all, I didn’t seek God’s counsel. I simply employed the same pre-battle strategy that had work for Jericho. I sent spies ahead to do reconnaissance. It worked well before, so I decided I should do it again. But God did not tell me to do that. God doesn’t necessarily want us to do the same things the same way all the time. Abi, I should have sought Eleazar’s counsel, but I didn’t. Since we had such an easy time defeating Jericho, I thought this would be easy as well. I was overconfident in our abilities and I drastically underestimated our opponent’s numbers and strength. I sent only three thousand men up the hills to take Ai, but we were beaten badly. The fighting men of Ai chased us down and overtook us, killing thirty six of our men. Oh, that reminds me of another lesson,” Joshua interjected.

“What is it? Abiel inquired.

“Have patience. We will get to it soon,” Joshua said with a grin on his face.

“Anyway, back to my story. When I received word of what happened I was overcome with despair, as you can imagine. The hearts of our people melted like water. I thought each battle would be easy since Yahweh was on our side. At this point I lost hope and began to question God’s plans. I suddenly thought we should have been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan - not to enter the Promised Land. I was in such deep despair that I torn my garments and fell face down in the dirt before the Ark until evening. I wallowed in the dust to express my sorrow and anguish about what had happened.

“But then God did something amazing! He asked me, *what are you doing with your face down in the dirt? Stand up!* You see Abiel, being sorrowful for your mistakes is healthy, but if we stay in the misery of our despair too long all we see is the dirt of our transgressions. We can’t stay there forever. So Yahweh lovingly told me to *stand up* and take my eyes off of the dirt! He told me to deal with the problem and not just stand still. Abiel, you can’t solve a problem until you acknowledge that you have one and accept responsibility for solving it. I assumed that because we had suffered one defeat that the whole military mission was a complete loss. But that was an incorrect assumption. I’ve found that incorrect assumptions lie at the root of every failure. Strong leaders have the courage to test those assumptions. In reality, God used that loss to test our resolve. It is not failure that holds a person back Abi, it is the fear of failure that paralyzes a person. I was so filled with fear I couldn’t move off the ground and get my face out of the dirt. I thought I was a failure, that is, until God told me to *stand up!* But failure is an event, not a person. *I* was not a failure. We had failed in one battle due to my overconfidence. So, God called us to deal with the problem and move on, and that is just what we did. And you know what happened to Achan, don’t you?” asked Joshua.

“Yes, I know. He suffered a horrible death because he brought disaster on the whole nation of Israel,” Abiel answered.

“Remember Abiel, no matter how discouraged you may get from failure, there are never any hopeless situations; but there *are* many people who lose hope in the face of tough situations. If you are to be a man of courage you must continually think about your objective, not about the things you fear. Keep in mind that God gives courage to His

chosen servants and He gives them the tools necessary to accomplish that to which He has called them.” With that, Joshua’s lesson on courage was complete.

As Abiel reflected on all that had happened that day, he set in his heart to be a man of courage. He realized that every great task starts with courage. He recognized that if he never starts, he will never arrive, and that it’s alright to take risks for God. He determined that even though he would surely encounter failure in the future, he would not let it affect him in a negative way, and that he would count each failure as one more way *not* to accomplish what he was striving to attain.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 5

1. Have you ever face a situation that demanded a lot of courage? Explain. How did it turn out? Did God give courage or did you proceed in fear, or not proceed at all?
2. As Moses prepared Joshua for his role as the new leader of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:7), has God put any people or circumstances in your life that have helped you be more courageous? Explain.
3. What “supplies” had God given you to help you face difficult challenges?
4. What Godly characteristics is God developing in your life?
5. The Israelites were reminded of God’s presence by the contents of the Ark. What reminds you of God’s presence today?
6. Joshua had Eleazar, the High Priest, to go to in finding out God’s will. Do you have someone in your life you can go to – to help you determine God’s will? If not, how can you find such a person?
7. Just as Joshua never let Abiel out of his sight (on his adventure with the sheep and the mountain lion), do you always sense God’s presence with you, or do you sometimes feel alone?
8. How can knowledge and action help overcome fear?
9. Tell about a time when you’ve been discouraged. How did it turn out?

10. Do you agree with the statement, *“It’s not what happens to us that matters, it is what we choose to do about what happens that makes the difference in how our lives turn out”*? Explain.
11. Have you ever had to get yourself up out of the “dirt” of your mistakes and deal with a problem? Explain. How does this apply to courage?
12. Joshua told Abiel, *“Failure is an event, not a person.”* Have you ever felt like a failure? How did you overcome that feeling?

Chapter Six

A Lesson About Patience

“God is not in a hurry.”

A couple of days later Joshua decided it would be a good day to finally go and visit Rahab. Even though she didn't live very far away - near the town of Gezer - it had been a long time since he had seen her. He was proud of Rahab. She really turned her life around. She left her previous profession and became a magnificent baker. Her baked goods were known throughout the region as the best around. Joshua also thought it would be good to have young Abiel accompany him. He could learn many lessons on a trip like this.

Joshua informed Abiel that he would come along on the trip to visit Rahab. Abiel looked forward to meeting her since the first time he heard about her and the story of her great faith. He sensed that he could learn a lot from her as well.

“Abiel, I've planned our route to Gezer. From here we will set out east towards Beth-dagon to the Great Sea. Then we will follow the coast south towards Jabeel. Finally, we will head west past Gibbethon and reach Rahab's home near Gezer.”

Abiel said “you know the way. I'll follow you,” not paying attention to the directions Joshua gave.

As they gathered the things they would need for the trip, Abiel thought about the provisions they were packing and it reminded him that God provides us with the things we need for the tasks He calls us to. After several hours of traveling Abiel suddenly remembered something. “Joshua, what was that *other lesson* you were going to teach me earlier? Remember? You told me you we'd talk about it later.”

“Have patience Abiel,” Joshua said.

Abiel got the same reply this time as he did last time and it started to bother him. He was tired of waiting. He thought *that's what he said last time. I want to get on with it!* Abiel was quickly growing intolerant.

As they hiked along, Joshua's pace began to lag. "Slow down Abi! I'm not as young as I used to be. We're in no hurry."

"Speak for yourself. I'd like to move along and get there. I'm excited to meet Rahab so I'd like to keep the pace moving, if that is alright."

"Abiel, you need to learn patience. That's *it*, you know!"

"That's what?"

"That's what we were just talking about. The *other lesson* I was going to teach you. When I told you to *have patience*, I was telling you that the lesson I'd be teaching you next was to *have patience!*"

"Oh! I thought you meant...well, never mind. So, you think I need to learn patience, do you?" asked Abiel, amused about the earlier misunderstanding.

"Yes. You're always in a hurry. Like right now! You need to learn to slow down and enjoy life. Patience is a virtue, Abi. Sometimes a handful of patience is more useful than a bucket full of intelligence. Many times, all God wants us to do is to have patience. He simply wants us to slow down and enjoy Him. If you have patience you'll experience more and enjoy more. Patience strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, subdues pride, and bridles the tongue. I've found that if you slow down the pace of your life you'll be more relaxed, happy and content. Patience, forbearance and understanding are the companions of contentment. It's alright to slow down and enjoy the journey. When we race towards the destination we miss the little things that add value to life. Take these flowers, for instance," Joshua said glancing toward the ground.

"What flowers?" Abiel asked.

"Slow down and look around." He waited for Abiel to comply. "See the beauty of these crocus flowers? Can you smell their fragrance? You will, only if you slow down and begin to notice the small things in life," Joshua continued.

Abiel stopped and looked down. He saw the beautiful purple crocus and inhaled deeply. Joshua was right. The flowers were beautiful and smelled nice too. He took some time to enjoy the flowers. As they walked and neared the shore of the Great Sea, Abiel started to enjoy the things he would have never seen had he kept up his hurried pace. The beauty of the sea shore and the sound of the waves crashing. The call of the gulls flying

overheard and the smell of the salt from the sea all made him appreciate the small things in life that, until today, he paid little attention to.

After walking about two more hours they approached Jabeel. Joshua said it was here that they needed to head west toward Gibbethon and Gezer to meet Rahab. Just then it occurred to Abiel. “Wait a minute! We’re making a big circle! From your home in Timnath-Sereh it would have been a shorter route to head southwest to Gezer. That would have been the more direct route and we’d have made much better time,” Abiel said insistently.

“Abiel, you still don’t understand, do you? God is not in a hurry and neither am I. Sometimes the long route is the best route. How fast you get to your destination is not always important. Let me tell you when I learned this lesson. Many years ago, before we settled in Canaan, the children of Israel were leaving Egypt. We set out to come to this land and we all thought that we’d conquer it right away. But because of our stubbornness, grumbling and complaining, God wanted us to learn some lessons; just like you’re learning lessons from me Abi. He wanted to teach us to be grateful and to trust Him. But because we had to learn those lessons, it took us forty years to complete an eleven day trip! You see, God was more concerned with the condition of our hearts than with getting us to our destination quickly. Abi, God would rather have us take longer to get somewhere, and be sure that we arrive as the right people. He is in no hurry. That is why I planned this route. I knew it would take longer, but that wasn’t my chief concern. My main interest was to teach you about patience. We’ve talked about slowing down the pace of life. Now I want to teach you the importance of waiting on God’s timing. How does that sound?”

“Well, I guess we’ve got the time,” Abiel said sarcastically.

“Yes. That we do! That we do!” Joshua laughed. “When I was a younger man I learned a lot about patience although I didn’t realize I was learning it until later on in life. Abi, you see me as a retired military general and leader of a nation, but I wasn’t always those things. Ever since I was a young man, not much older than you, I was an aide to Moses. I followed him and spent most of my time with him. He taught me a lot. I was his faithful assistant for a long time. After many years serving in that capacity, Moses promoted me to be one of his generals and eventually I led the entire Hebrew army. I

must humbly confess, that is a pretty important job. But it came only after many years of faithfully serving Moses, and serving God. Abi, I believe if you are patient and faithful in small things God will eventually entrust you with larger, more important things. And it was only after serving Yahweh faithfully in a servant capacity that He called me to lead our people into the Promised Land.

“You see, I’ve always said, *first comes the servant call, and later the greater call*. It’s not easy being a loyal servant. You go through many hardships and challenges. But any great achievement is preceded by difficulties and many lessons. Great accomplishments are not possible without them. Difficulties come not to obstruct, but to instruct. We learn valuable lessons from all the trials we face.

“Do you see the need to wait on God’s timing and be patient? When I was Moses’ aide, I wasn’t ready to be a general. God was preparing me. And when I was Moses’ general, I wasn’t equipped to be the leader of a nation. But again, God was grooming me. Nothing worthwhile ever happens in a hurry. It takes time to be prepared for any leadership role. It requires patience and a willingness to learn. We had to go through the wilderness for forty years to get to the Promised Land, but it was well worth it. Many people want to get to their *promised land* without first going through the *wilderness* of preparation. They tend to want quick recognition, sudden prominence and instant responsibility. But, like a farmer, we need to learn that we can’t sow and reap the same day. It’s a process.

“After years of reflecting about God’s hand on my life and His timing, I believe God knew that I would need these leadership qualities. God had a *call* on my life. He promised the children of Israel they would inherit the land, and now after the death of Moses, they needed a new leader to lead them in. When God makes a promise, faith believes it, hope anticipates it, and patience quietly awaits its fulfillment. That’s why patience is so important. If you rush through life, you may miss the lessons God wants to teach you. Abi, had we taken the quicker route to Gezer we wouldn’t have had the time to talk about this, and you wouldn’t have learned all you did today about the virtue of patience.”

“Joshua, you are right...as usual. I’m glad we took the long way here, past the Great Sea. I got to slow down and notice the crocus, the birds and the sea. I got to listen to another one of your stories, and the time seemed to hurry by,” Abiel said.

And the time *had indeed* rushed by. Just as he finished speaking both Abiel and Joshua looked up to see an attractive, middle aged woman running towards them.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 6

1. Do you feel your life is always in a rush and you need to slow down? Explain.
2. What are some small things we miss in life by not slowing down?
3. Joshua tells Abiel “patience, forbearance and understanding are the companions of contentment.” His is this true?
4. Have you ever found the longer route to be the best route? Explain,
5. Do you believe that “if you are patient and faithful in small things God will eventually entrust you with larger, more important things”, as Joshua told Abiel?
6. Joshua said “first comes the servant call, and later the greater call.” How is servanthood a prerequisite for greater responsibility? Joshua says, “Great accomplishments are not possible without difficulties.” What can servanthood teach us that will be helpful in leadership?
7. In our day of quick recognition, sudden prominence and instant responsibility, why is the “wilderness of preparation” necessary to go through before we get to our “promised land”?
8. What is God preparing for you, or what kind of person is God preparing you to become?
9. “When God makes a promise, faith believes it, hope anticipates it, and patience quietly awaits its fulfillment.” In what area (believing it, anticipating it, or waiting for it) do you have the most trouble in believing God’s promises?

Chapter Seven

A Lesson About Balance

“Success comes when your inner life and your outer life are in harmony.”

“Joshua you old fox! How are you?” Rahab shouted as she ran toward the two travelers.

Joshua ran to her and gave her a big bear hug. It was the kind of hug that expressed their deep friendship and the fact that they had missed each other very much.

“How long has it been?” Rahab asked. “I’ll bet it’s been more than a year. We really should see more of each other. And who is this handsome young man?” She smiled and looked at Abiel.

“This is my nephew’s son, Abiel. He has been staying with me while his parents are away,” Joshua said.

At first Abiel felt more comfortable in the background and wanted to let these two old friends catch up, but noticing the warmth of her smile and twinkle in her eyes it made him feel right at home. He approached Rahab as she extended her hand toward his.

“It’s very nice to meet you Abiel. Please, call me Rahab, and welcome to my home! How was your trip?”

Abiel shook her hand and proceeded to tell her about their journey and the things he had learned about patience along the way. They entered Rahab’s home and could smell she had been preparing a meal for them. The smell made Abiel’s mouth water and it reminded him of home.

Over the meal Joshua and Rahab caught up on old times. They discussed the first time they had met, shortly after the battle of Jericho, and the miracle that God rescued her and her family from the total destruction of her home town. They talked about her courage in hiding the two spies that Joshua had sent and of the faith she put in Yahweh just from hearing stories of His provision to Israel, while they were on the other side of the Jordan.

They discussed more recent events too. She talked about the sudden death of her husband just a few years earlier but expressed gratitude to God for giving him to her and

for all the years they spent together. They also discussed her successful business as a baker, and how she started the business *from scratch*. Joshua chuckled at the play on words, but Abiel didn't understand it. He figured it was an inside joke. Abiel was impressed with the fact that she had built a business on her own and that it was so successful that she was famous for the quality of her baked goods. She showed them the ovens in her kitchen as well as the bags she used to transport the baked goods every other day into the market in Gezer where she would sell them.

“Is there anything we can help you with while we're here?” asked Joshua.

“Yes as a matter of fact, there is. The bread stand that I use at the market in town needs some repair. One of the legs is broken and my loaves of bread keep rolling off. Once they hit the dirt I immediately have a half price sale!” Both Joshua and Abiel laughed. “Would you accompany me to town tomorrow and fix it for me? After that, you could head back to Timnath-Sereh. It shouldn't take too long to get home from there,” Rahab said with a grin, referring to the lesson on patience Abiel had just learned.

Joshua laughed again and said they would be glad to. After the meal and a little more talking, the three of them decided to get to sleep early. Joshua and Abiel were tired from the trip and Rahab had to get up early to prepare the bread for the next day.

The crowing rooster woke Abiel early the next morning. The scent of freshly baked bread filled the air and encouraged him to get out of bed. Joshua rose earlier and was helping Rahab prepare breakfast in the kitchen. When the meal was finished they gathered what they needed for their short trip into town.

“We'll need to put the bread in these bags and carry them to town. I can handle that. We'll also need to bring some tools from my shed outside, and we must not forget the prayer scroll. We will be at the market over the lunch hour and it is my custom to spend some time in prayer at mid-day. These scrolls have many prayers written on them and they help me in my prayer time with Yahweh,” Rahab said convincingly.

They gathered all they needed and headed into town. It wasn't long before the three of them reached a brook. The morning sun made it a welcome sight. Each took a turn dipping their cupped hands into the cool stream and drinking. After they had finished their short break they looked at the stream. The way across was clear. There were several

stones protruding from the water, each about a stride apart. But what Joshua suggested next seemed odd.

“Abiel, why don’t you take the scroll and the tools along with you as you cross the stream?” Joshua said, *telling* Abiel more than suggesting it. As he said this, Rahab shot a knowing glance in Joshua’s direction as if to say *yes*. Abiel thought it was a little strange that Joshua asked him to carry *both* the scroll and the tools, but none the less complied. He picked up the scroll in one hand and carried the bag of tools in the other and carefully crossed the stream on the stones. He took his time, not wanting to fall in and humiliate himself. Managing to stay dry he reached the other side followed by Joshua and Rahab. They continued the trip into town but what was on Abiel’s mind bothered him so that he finally had to speak up.

“Joshua, do you mind if I ask you something?” Abiel inquired.

“No. Not at all. What is it?”

“I was wondering why you asked me to carry both the prayer scroll and the tools across the brook. Some help would have been nice.”

Rahab piped in, “it’s time you learn another lesson young Abiel. Go ahead Joshua.”

“Balance! It’s all about balance. I had you carry both the scroll and the tools to provide you with balance. If you had taken either the scroll or the tools you would have had too much weight on one side and been out of balance. You probably would have fallen in the stream. Carrying both provided the proper balance you needed. Success in life is all about balance Abi. Think of the tools as representing work and the scroll as representing prayer. Work is very important, but so is prayer. What we do in the physical world is closely related to what happens in the spiritual realm. Success comes when your inner life and your outer life are in harmony. Both hard work and fervent prayer must be balanced. Both are important and you won’t get far in life concentrating on just one or the other. Both must be passionately pursued. I’ve always tried to work like praying doesn’t help, and pray like working doesn’t help. In reality, both are necessary for things to really happen.”

Abiel seemed to understand when Rahab jumped in. “Joshua, tell him about the Amalekites and the battle in the valley. Abiel, this is one of the stories I had heard when I

was living in Jericho that started me believing in the power of Yahweh. It's an incredible story of the power of God and the importance of both prayer and hard work. Oh yes, Joshua, you go ahead and tell it. After all, you know it better than I since you were instrumental in the victory."

"Yes, I played my part, but we all did our job and God gave the victory. Abiel, this happened back when your grandfather was still alive, and your father was just a boy. Moses had just led us out of Egypt. You've already heard that story. Shortly after God began providing Manna for us to eat, we were camped at a place called Rephidim. Now Rephidim lay in a valley, on a plain between some large hills. All the children of Israel were camped there when we were suddenly attacked by the Amakitites. By this time, I had been put in charge of Moses' army and he commanded me to choose some men to go fight the Amalekites. But that was only part of the plan."

"What was the other part?" Abiel asked.

"The other part was prayer. Moses interceded to God on our behalf for the battle. He, Aaron the High Priest, and Hur went up on the hill by the battlefield to pray. It was a strange battle. At times we were winning, and just as soon as I thought victory was at hand we began to lose ground. The Amalekites would begin to advance and overtake us. Then after a while we'd gain the upper hand again. Amalekites. This went on and on, until finally we overcame them by the sword at sunset."

"Why did the battle go back and forth like that?"

"I later found out that it was all because of Moses' prayer. He climbed the hill to watch the battle and pray. When he stretched out his hand and held out the staff of God over the battlefield, we began to prevail. But Moses was a man of ordinary strength and he got weary. From time to time his arms would get tired and slump down. When this happened, the Amalekites would start to win the battle. It was a good thing that Moses brought Aaron and Hur with him to pray. We can always accomplish more together. When they saw that the success of the battle below was directly linked to what Moses was doing on the hill, they sat him down on a rock and held his arms up. Because of their help, Moses' arms stayed up, he continued to pray, and we won the battle in the valley below.

“The physical reality of the fighting was obviously important to the victory, but so was the spiritual reality of prayer. Abi, human effort and divine intervention work together to carry out God’s will. I held a sword in my hand, but Moses held the rod in his. Both worked together and God brought the victory. That day I learned about balance. There’s a balance between confidence in self, and dependence on God. Fighting alone, or praying alone wouldn’t have accomplished much. In fact, it would have led to defeat, just as you crossing the brook with only the tools or only the prayer scroll. You would have been *out* of balance and *in* the brook.

“Some people only concentrate on one of these two important aspects of victory. They either spend all their time in prayer and seeking God, but never move out and conquer anything, or they run head first into a battle that they haven’t prayed about. Nearly everything I’ve been successful in, I’ve prayed about first. Focus always precedes success. If you seek God in prayer first, then everything else will work itself out. We must first pray, but then we must learn to convert what God is saying into action. You see, faith without action doesn’t accomplish anything. The two are fundamentally tied together.”

Abiel had to think about it, but it all made sense. *Balance. Prayer and effort working together. Just one or the other won’t provide balance or lead to success.* And before the three of them knew it, they’d reached Gezer. It didn’t take long for Abiel to fix the leg on Rahab’s bread stand at the market. Joshua helped her sell the bread that morning and afternoon. They had a wonderful lunch together of fruit and vegetables they’d purchased at the market, along with some of Rahab’s famous bread, of course. They enjoyed a wonderful time of prayer to Yahweh, using the prayer scroll that Rahab insisted on bringing on the trip.

As the afternoon wore on it came time to go their separate ways – Rahab, back to her home outside of Gezer and Abiel and Joshua to his home near Timnath-Sereh. After some final words of thanks, Joshua and Abiel each gave Rahab a hug and set out. Neither of them had to tell the other that the shortest, most direct route was to the north east and their trip home took considerably less time than their trip there. Still, Abiel didn’t mind the longer trip they’d taken the day before because he had learned patience. And he was

glad he accompanied Joshua on his trip to visit Rahab because he learned another valuable lesson about balance.

On the way home they discussed the importance of balancing prayer and hard work and the fact that both are needed in accomplishing anything. “Abiel,” Joshua said. “I believe we are both *action first* people by nature. Let’s hold each other accountable and make sure that the other will always seek God in prayer before striving to do something.” Abiel agreed. He greatly appreciated all that Joshua had been teaching him over these past weeks, but it especially made him feel good to know that *he* would be reminding Joshua to maintain balance as well. *I guess we’re never too old to be learning lessons* he thought to himself.

As they were getting close to Joshua’s home, they passed a rocky cliff by a large pond and Abiel saw something that would lead him to yet another important life lesson.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 7

1. Rahab had the custom of praying at mid-day. Do you find it helpful to have an established, set time of prayer? Why or why not?
2. Do you ever feel emotionally or spiritually out of balance? What do you think is the reason?
3. If you had to pick just one, where do you naturally tend to lean – toward work or toward prayer? Which do you think is more important? Do you agree or disagree with the statement, “human effort and divine intervention work together to carry out God’s will”?
4. How is what we do in the physical realm closely related to what we do in the spiritual realm?
5. Do you know anyone you would consider a “prayer warrior”? Who?
6. Read Exodus 17:8-16. Moses had Aaron and Hur with him while he prayed. How did this help Moses? How can others help you to pray?
7. Have you ever been out of balance between self-confidence and dependence on God? Explain what happened.

Chapter Eight

A Lesson About the Power of Association

“You can learn a lot just by watching.”

As they approached the pond all seemed fine, initially. But then the reality of the situation hit like a slap in the face. Abiel noticed it first. He looked up to see a young antelope on the precipice of the cliff by the pond. Just as he was about to say something, it was too late. The antelope slipped on the wet rock and fell into the water below.

Both Joshua and Abiel loved animals and didn't want anything bad to happen to any animal, so it was difficult for them to watch the young antelope struggle for its life in the water. Finally Abiel could not just watch any longer. He *had* to do something. He shouted out, “Joshua, I'm going to jump in and try to pull her out,” as he darted towards the water.

“Wait Abiel! There's something you don't know. Just wait a minute!” Joshua shouted.

Abiel paused for a moment.

“I want you to look carefully at what's happening.” Joshua had seen something that Abiel had not, making the situation considerably less dire.

Just then Abiel noticed the head of a larger antelope – obviously its mother – peering around one of the rocks jutting out from the cliff. As soon as he noticed her, she was in the water wading toward her young one.

Joshua said, “Now watch Abiel. You could learn an important lesson here. It's not *falling* into water that will cause you to drown, it's *staying* in the water that will cause you to drown. That young antelope won't be staying in that water for long.”

The words were not off his lips when the mother pulled it's young one from the water, dragging her to the safety of the shore. Both of them stood up, shook the water from their backs and trotted off, away from the pond as if nothing had happened.

“Joshua,” Abiel said. “I'm glad things turned out the way they did, but why did you stop me from jumping in to save her. Did you think I'd get hurt?”

“Oh no, it’s not that at all. I wanted you to learn another lesson,” Joshua said as they continued to walk. “You can learn a lot just by watching. That in itself is an important lesson. Learning by watching is an efficient way to learn. Abiel, you’ve learned a lot over these past few months and I’m proud of you. But this lesson is about the importance of learning itself. I want to teach you to be a lifelong student. The more you learn, the more success and confidence you will have. There are limitless things to learn and you have limitless potential. Remaining stagnant is never good. Remember, you’ll only *drown* if you stay in the place that you’ve always been. Abiel, God has given you a unique combination of talents and abilities. When properly identified and applied, they will enable you to achieve almost any goal you set for yourself.”

“I don’t know. I’m not much of a student. I don’t like structure,” Abiel objected.

“Learning does not always happen in a structured setting. You can learn from simple things like observing. Learning simple lessons may seem mundane, but every great success is a combination of thousands of ordinary efforts no one sees or appreciates. Achieving any big task is simply a combination of accomplishing many smaller tasks. But sometimes you have to stretch yourself to learn. Abi, I want to encourage you to get around people who will encourage you to grow and learn. Go where the expectations and demands to perform are high. Don’t let life slip by without watching and learning.”

“You seem to know a lot about this. How did you learn so much?”

“I’m glad you asked. Besides reading God’s Law, I learned from two very important people. They mentored me. I learned a lot just by watching them. It’s important to have a mentor in your life – someone to watch, study under, learn from! My father always told me – *get around the right people. Associate with positive, goal oriented men of God who will encourage you and inspire you.* There is an incredible power in association. Spend time with successful people. Not someone you like best, but someone who makes you like *yourself* better when you are with them.

“Mentoring is very different from just teaching. Being a mentor involves building trust. If people like you, they’ll listen to you, but if they *trust* you, they’ll follow you. Some teachers teach others to simply learn. Not me. I consider myself a mentor. Mentors teach others to accomplish. My goal is to translate responses into results and I think

you've been responding well Abi. I can see real progress in you since the day you came to stay with me. Yes, real progress!"

Abiel smiled. It made him feel good to know that Joshua was seeing him grow. "Who were your mentors?" he asked.

"As I said, I had two mentors. Both taught me important things at different times in my life. My first mentor was Moses, the servant of the Lord! He taught me many things when we were in the wilderness of Sinai. After we conquered Canaan, Eleazar the High Priest was my mentor. I am grateful that both of these men invested vast amounts of time in me. I can honestly say that I would not be the man you see today without their help.

"Let me first tell you about Moses. I learned many things just by watching Moses. I spent a lot of time with him and learned a lot about *my* relationship with God from *his* relationship with God. He talked with God face to face. I was privileged enough to accompany Moses up Mount Sinai. Most of the people had to stay behind. Even the priests didn't get to go as far up the mountain as I did. I was there in the tent when God spoke to Moses - but I couldn't look at God or I would die! His glory was *that* powerful. From that experience I learned that it is important to go as far as you can with God and not get left behind. You could miss a lot of blessing by lagging behind.

"I also learned a lot from watching Moses in the battles we were in. When we were camped at Rephidim, I learned the same lesson I taught you about balance. I was in charge of the army as the Amalekites attacked, but I learned that success is not all on the battlefield. Our success was tied to Moses' prayer on the mountain. Moses wanted all Israel to learn that lesson, but me especially because he was mentoring me to be a leader.

"When I was a young man I learned a lot about courage – which I would need when we got to the Promised Land. Before we wandered in the desert those forty years, we reached the Promised Land and were about to go in - or so I thought. Even though the people didn't trust God to give us the land, I learned a valuable lesson about standing up for what you believe in. Moses had sent Caleb and me, along with ten others, to spy out the land. It was beautiful. Full of abundant produce, milk and honey. It was just what I had always dreamed about. But it also had large fortified cities. Many of the people were as big as giants. But God had promised to give us this land and Caleb and I believed it.

We told the people that even though the obstacles seemed large it was worth it and we should go in immediately and take the land.”

“So what happened?” Abiel asked.

“Unfortunately the people listened to the other ten spies. They convinced them that we were like grasshoppers compared to the inhabitants of the land and that they were stronger than us. The people doubted God and believed that bad report. Even though we had to wander through the desert forty years because of that decision – until that whole generation died off – I will never forget the lesson I learned that day. Sometimes the majority isn’t always right! Right is right no matter how few people say it is, and wrong is wrong no matter how many people say it’s not. You have to stand up for what you believe in! You need to stand on the promises of God even though the circumstances seem insurmountable. That was a lesson I learned, and it applied to many situations in the Promised Land.”

“It sounds like Moses was a big inspiration on your life. Tell me more about how he influenced you,” Abiel asked.

“Influence is an important part of mentoring. There are two parts to influence. First, influence can be powerful. A dynamic person may inspire you to take a substantial step of faith for God. Powerful influence inspires you to greatness. But influence can be subtle too. But just because it is subtle doesn’t make it less effective. Subtle influence nudges you to take a small step, but that step can be a critical one and have a vital outcome. Moses knew when to powerfully inspire me and when to subtly nudge me. He also never sent me out to take on a task that I couldn’t handle. He always taught me first, and then watched me and coached me as I was attempting it. He said *let’s go do it together*, not *you go do it alone*. It’s powerful when someone says *let’s!*”

As they continued to Joshua’s home Abiel said, “tell me about Eleazar,” not wanting his lesson on mentoring to end.

“When Moses was near the end of his life, he commissioned me to be the new leader of the nation of Israel and to lead the people into the Promised Land. That seemed like a huge responsibility. But do you remember the lesson about God not giving you a task that He has not equipped you to handle?” Joshua asked.

“Yes. When you sent me out to find those lost sheep you sent with me a stick and pan to scare away that mountain lion, and you sent Cholo to round up the sheep. That was like God providing the things necessary for Israel to manage in the wilderness. He gave them the Ark of the Covenant to remind them that God was with them, and He gave them the Law to remind them of His ways. You said something about Eleazar earlier. Remind me who he was and how he became a mentor.”

“Eleazar was the son of Aaron the High Priest. When Aaron died, Eleazar became High Priest. He was very helpful to me - almost like God was helping me through Eleazar. In fact, the name Eleazar means *God helps*. When Moses commissioned me to be the new leader, I stood before Eleazar. Moses made it clear to me that if I ever needed help making an important decision, I could go to Eleazar and he would seek the counsel of God on my behalf.”

“Was his advice helpful?” Abiel asked.

“Very helpful! As we conquered the land of Canaan, there were many times I sought his advice. He would seek the counsel of the Lord for me and report to me what He felt the Lord was saying. I learned to trust his advice completely. In fact, when it came time to divide up the land to all the clans and families of Israel, I leaned heavily on Eleazar’s advice. We gathered at Shiloh and Eleazar went into the tent of meeting and sought the Lord. And the division of the land went smoothly. Everyone was grateful for the portion of land that was allotted to them. I learned that it is always good to seek Godly advice from a trusted mentor regarding important decisions. I hope you can remember that Abi.”

“I will Joshua. I’ll remember that we can learn a lot by watching others, and that it is important to have a trusted mentor to teach you, challenge you, and help you to make wise decisions.”

As they neared Joshua’s home, Abiel was still speaking when he heard Cholo bark and saw him run to Joshua. The dog jumped up on his master and greeted him by licking his face. Joshua didn’t seem to mind. They had arrived back at Timnath-Sereh without realizing it. What an eventful day it had been. Both exhausted, they turned in for bed without saying much, but the events of the day filled Abiel’s mind in such a way that it was difficult for him to get to sleep that night.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 8

1. What was your attitude about learning when you were in school? Did you learn best by reading, watching or doing?
2. Joshua tells Abiel that “every great success is a combination of thousands of ordinary efforts no one sees or appreciates.” If this is true, how does it encourage you in the mundane tasks of life?
3. Joshua speaks of the power of association. How can hanging around the right kind of people benefit you?
4. Do you have someone acting as a mentor in your life? How is a mentor different from a teacher? What are some qualities one would look for in a mentor?
5. Have you ever learned more about your relationship with God from seeing someone else’s relationship with God, as Joshua did from Moses? Explain.
6. Read Numbers chapter 13. Have you ever had to stand up for what you believed was right, even if it contradicted popular opinion?
7. What are the two aspects of influence, and how does each one work?
8. Have you ever had a “*God helps*” person in your life, like Eleazar?

Chapter Nine

A Lesson About Humility

“God uses our abilities, but without Him we can do nothing.”

Several days after their trip to Gezer, Joshua and Abiel went into Timnath-Serah. Joshua had business to attend to and Abiel went along to play with some friends. But the playing turned into competition, as it often does with boys that age.

Abiel’s friend Hadar said, “Abiel! I challenge you, Thaddeus and Adir to a relay race against me, Ben-Aryeh and Elhannan. We’ll each take a turn racing with a stick from here, around that tree and back. Then we’ll hand the stick to the next one on our team. The first team back to this spot wins!”

Never one to back down from a challenge, Abiel looked at the tree and sized up his opponents. “You’re on. Give me the stick!”

The boys discussed strategy and decided who would go first, next and last. Because Abiel was the fastest, they agreed that he would run last.

Joshua watched the events unfold and asked the boys if they needed someone to start the race and to see which team wins. They all agreed that he would be the race official. Joshua explained the rules and the starting signal. He told the boys he expected a fair race and wished both teams good luck. As the teams got ready Abiel felt his heart start to pound. Not because he was about to run – he was the last one to run for his team – but because he loved a challenge and hated to lose.

As soon as Joshua yelled *go* the race was on! The first two boys, Thaddeus and Ben-Aryeh took off quickly - each with a stick. They reached the tree at the same time but Ben-Aryeh emerged from around the tree first. Abiel’s team was already behind. As Ben-Aryeh handed his stick to Elhannan and Thaddeus handed his stick to Adir the race was close again. By the time the boys had rounded the tree again and got to Abiel, his team was now slightly ahead. As Abiel grabbed the stick from Adir, he ran straight for the tree with the speed of a gazelle. He turned the corner around the tree, caught a glimpse of his friend Hadar over his shoulder - a few strides behind him - and headed for

the finish with all his might. The other children watching were cheering as Abiel crossed the finish line and won the race!

“Ha - ha! We won. I knew we would!” Abiel shouted. “I guess that will be the last time you challenge us to a race,” Abiel sneered at the other boys.

Abiel strutted up to Joshua. “Did you see me Joshua? How fast was I? I’ll bet I could beat them any day!” Abiel gloated.

“Yes, yes...perhaps,” Joshua said softly. “We must be going now. Say goodbye to your friends and let’s be on our way.”

With a few more jabs from Abiel, they left the other boys. Joshua quickly finished his business in Timnath-Serah and headed back to his home outside the town. As they walked along Abiel said “Joshua, you must admit I was pretty fast. My team couldn’t have done it without me!”

“The truth is they probably could have! Perhaps they could have even run faster without you. Abiel, you need to learn a lesson on humility. I noticed how prideful you were acting. Abi, pride is usually followed by calamity. When I see someone full of pride, I know something will come along soon to humble them. That’s just the way it works. Let me tell you a fable about pride.

“Once there was a prideful frog who lived near a pond. Because it was the dry season, his pond had all but dried up. Being rather desperate and not wanting to die of thirst, he sought a way out of his parched predicament. The frog had an idea! He came upon two hawks about to fly east where there was more water. So he asked them to give him a ride. One of the hawks said they would be glad to, if he could devise a way for them to carry him. Being a clever frog, he told them if they each would hold one end of a long stalk of grass in their claws and begin to fly, he would hold the middle of the stalk of grass in his mouth and they could give him a ride through the air.

“It seemed like a reasonable plan, so the hawks each held one end of a stalk of grass in their claws and the frog held on to the middle with its mouth. Away they flew. The plan seemed to be working! But as they flew overhead, several people noticed the peculiar sight. Many clapped and cheered. One man shouted up to the sky - *that’s remarkable! Who thought of the clever way to get from one place to another?* And being a prideful frog, he opened his mouth and shouted - *It’s was I! It was I!* But as he opened

his mouth to brag about his idea he lost grip of the stalk of grass and fell back to the ground to his death.

“Now that’s just a fable Abi, but it has an important point. When you have a good thing going, it’s best to keep your mouth shut. It’s important to learn humility. Whoever lifts himself up will be brought low again, just like that frog. I’ve learned a lot about humility over the years. I used to think God's gifts were on shelves one above the other, and that the taller we grew in our faith in Him the easier we could reach them. I have now found that God's gifts are on shelves one beneath the other. It is not a question of growing taller but of stooping lower. We have to go down, always down, to get His best gifts. Humility is a lesson I learned many years ago, and one I can never forget.”

“Why is that?” Abiel asked.

“Because I’m reminded of it every time I hear my name. You know me as *Joshua*. But I wasn’t always known by that name. Many years ago, my mentor Moses changed my name. He changed it for a very important reason – so I would always remember something about myself and God. You see, originally my name was *Hoshea*, which means *salvation*. But Moses changed it to *Joshua*, which means *the Lord is salvation*. Granted, that may seem like a small change, but in reality it is very significant.

“You see Abi, I have been blessed by God and He has used me in many important ways. Even though God used me to bring our people into the Promised Land, it was the Lord himself who led the people. Had Moses not changed my name, I may have begun to think that *I* was their means of salvation. After all, God was using me, right?”

“He sure was!” Abiel replied. “He used you in miraculous ways. I guess I can see how that might make you prideful.”

“Yes it could have! But because Moses changed my name it made me realize that even though God was using me, it was *God* that separated the waters of the Jordan, *God’s* strength that caused the walls of Jericho to collapse, *God’s* wisdom that enabled us to strategize against our enemies, and *God’s* power that brought victory over them. Every time I hear my name, I remember that it was not *me* that brought about salvation. It was the *Lord* who brought salvation! God uses our abilities, but without him we can do nothing. I believe that all things are possible, but it is through God’s strength that we can

accomplish great achievements - not our own. My name change illustrates that it was God, and God alone, that is our salvation.

“Abiel, you were not put on this earth just for you. First and foremost, you are here to give glory to God. You are also here to add something to other people’s lives as well. You are here for others, just like you were part of the team of boys you raced with. You can always accomplish more as a team than as an individual. You boys made a good team but none of you could have won that race without the help of the others. The strength of the team is each individual member, and the strength of each member is the team. A team divides the task and multiples the success. Abiel, let me ask you a question. What made your team win that race?”

“Six fast feet,” Abiel laughed.

“Well, that’s partially right. You three boys used six fast feet, but you also used your arms to run and your hands to pass the stick. You used your eyes to watch where you were running and your mouth to encourage your teammates. You used your chest to breathe in the air and your mind to plan a strategy. You see, it took all those separate parts of your bodies - all working together - to win the race. *None* of us are as fast, or strong or smart as *all* of us. My father always told me that *the whole is greater than the sum of all its parts*.

“Teamwork is important not just in racing, but in all areas of life. Think about your family. Each member of your family has a job to do. They are all important and you wouldn’t be a good family unless everyone did their part. Your father works hard to earn money to provide for you. Your mother does most of the cooking and cleaning. They both spend time teaching you. You do your chores to lighten their load. Abi, many hands make lighter work. Even though your roles are different, all are an important part of making your family thrive. None can be left out. A family where everyone is doing their part is a happy family – just like your team was happy when you won the race.”

“Yes, that was a great race, wasn’t it? I was excited I won!”

“Yes. I noticed you were very happy after the race, but it seemed you were only happy for yourself and not happy for the other boys on your team. In your exuberance, you made the other boys feel bad, even if you were just joking. It’s important to be a

good sport, win or lose. It's also important to be happy for others when they succeed. I learned that lesson many years ago, when I was still young and full of pride."

"You learned a lesson about teamwork?" Abiel asked.

"Well, sort of. It was more a lesson about being happy for others who succeed. Many years before we settled in Canaan, not long after we left Egypt, Moses led us through the desert. He gathered together seventy of the elders of Israel from the camp and had them gather around the Tent of Meeting. As Moses' aide, I was there too. God's spirit came down like a cloud and rested on the elders and they started prophesying. But not all of the elders were present at the Tent for this remarkable event. Two of them, Eldad and Medad, remained in the camp. But God's spirit rested on them as well and they also began to prophesy. While this was happening someone told Moses that Eldad and Medad were also prophesying back in the camp. I thought this would lessen Moses leadership, so I voiced my opinion. I shouted, *Moses, my lord, stop them!* I made it clearly known that because they were not present at the Tent with the rest of us, they should stop prophesying immediately."

"What happened?" Abiel asked.

"Moses set me straight! He told me I was being needlessly jealous for his sake. He said I should be happy that Eldad and Medad were prophesying, and that he wished all God's people could experience what they did. You see, I was only thinking about those present at the Tent of Meeting – Moses, myself and the seventy elders. I wasn't thinking about the blessing it would be to the others. I was being selfish and prideful.

"God taught me a lot about pride Abiel, but it all started with that incident. I now realize that we are all working for the same cause and when one succeeds, we all succeed. When someone on our team or in our family wins, we all should celebrate. What have you learned today, Abi?"

Abiel thought for a moment and said "I learned that even though we may succeed in an area of life, it is really God who gives us the ability, and all the glory should go to Him. And because of that, I should be humble. I also learned about being a part of a team. Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. I can accomplish more as a teammate than I can by myself, and even though we all have different rolls on a team, they are all necessary if we are going to win."

“Anything else?” Joshua asked.

“Yes. When it comes to competition, if I win I should not brag and if I lose I should be happy for the person who won. But most of all, when I’m in a relay race, it’s very important to have the official be on *my* side,” Abiel said with a wink and a laugh.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 9

1. Why do you think pride is such a strong issue to deal with?
2. As Joshua's fable of the prideful frog stated, "When you have a good thing going, it's best to keep your mouth shut." Why is this true?
3. Do you agree with the idea of God's gifts being on shelves one beneath the other, and that humility is required to grow in our spiritual walk?
4. Just as Moses changed Joshua's name to remind him of an important aspect of his relationship with God, do you have any "daily reminders" of an important aspect of your faith?
5. Has God ever taught you the lesson of humility? Share how God did this in your life.
6. How does the statement "God uses our abilities, but without him we can do nothing" relate to the concept of "self-confidence vs. depending on God", and the "work/prayer balance" concept discussed earlier?
7. Has anyone ever given you the praise when the glory should have gone to God? How did you handle this?
8. Joshua tells Abiel the advantages of a team. "You can always accomplish more as a team than as an individual." Have you ever been on a winning or successful team? Share that experience. Joshua tells Abiel "the strength of the team is each individual member, and the strength of each member is the team." How did being on a team affect your individual performance?

9. Have you ever been part of a team or family where everyone was not doing their part? Explain how the team or family functioned?
10. Read Numbers 11:24-30. Have you ever been jealous of someone else's spiritual blessing or success, as Joshua was of Eldad and Medad?
11. Why do you think it is easy for Christians to be jealous of the spiritual blessings of other Christians?
12. What does 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 teach us about unity in the body of Christ?

Chapter Ten

A Lesson About Refuge

“God has provided a refuge that all can run to.”

The following week Joshua told Abiel of his plans to go see a priest who lived in Shechem. Joshua explained that all the priests in the land were of the tribe of Levi and that he allotted the Levites certain cities spread throughout the land, so they could perform their priestly functions for the people.

Abiel wasn't interested why Joshua wanted to see the priest. All he knew is that he wanted to go along. He believed there would be some more valuable lessons to be learned, and he was right.

After they made preparations, they headed east toward the wide road that leads from Bethel to Shechem. When they got to the road they headed north toward Shechem, talking as they walked. Suddenly Abiel remembered something. “When my father and I were coming to you, we passed through Shechem and he said something interesting. He said there was something significant about the city of Shechem but he couldn't remember what it was. Either he couldn't remember, or he *did* tell me and *I* don't remember. Either way, what is so special about Shechem?” Abiel asked.

“Ah! There are many important things in the city of Shechem that I want to teach you Abiel.” But they were suddenly interrupted by something quite strange. Rather, *someone* quite strange. A man came running up behind them. Normally, this would not be too out of the ordinary. But what was peculiar was the expression on his face and the panic in his voice.

“Help! Get out of my way! I must get through,” he cried out, nearly out of breath. In his panic he shouted many other things that didn't make a bit of sense.

Joshua said, “Slow down young man! Allow me to help. I am Joshua and this is Abiel. What can we do for you?”

The man slowed down and led them to the side of the road, shielding himself behind some trees. Looking over his shoulder several times he said, “My name is Laban and I will quickly tell you my plight. Then I must hurry on to Shechem.”

“Why are you in such a hurry?” Abiel asked.

Laban explained as he told them his story. “I am from Shiloh, not far from here. But a terrible thing has happened. I was walking along a cliff with my good friend Tobias and his brother when I slipped on a loose rock. Losing my balance I reached out to Tobias to steady myself. I pulled on his arm, but he accidentally fell off the cliff to his death. It was a tragic accident! But his brother flew into a rage and is chasing me. I believe he is going to kill me. That is why I am running to Shechem – to gain protection until I can get a fair trial.”

“I don’t understand. What is in Shechem?” Abiel asked.

Joshua said, “Abiel, I will explain it to you, but right now we must send our new friend on his way,” and with a quick prayer for protection and blessing they sent Laban on to Shechem.

“Abiel, Shechem is not only a Levite city, but it is also a city of refuge,” Joshua explained as they continued their journey, at a much slower pace than that of their new friend.

“What’s a *city of refuge* and why was that man running to it?” Abiel asked, as Laban quickly withdrew from their sight.

“God has provided a refuge that all can run to. A city of refuge is a provision by Yahweh so that no innocent blood will be shed in our land. There are many things to learn about the cities of refuge. There is protection in the cities. Moses commanded me to set up six cities of refuge for security. He said if there is a death caused unintentionally, these cities will provide protection and safety until the accused gets a fair trial. The closest relative of a person who is killed is known as the *avenger of blood*. This man might seek to exact justice on the accused but often, in his rage, he may not wait for a proper trial. So the accused can run to the city of refuge for protection. If acquitted of the charge, he will still enjoy protection from the avenger of blood as long as he stays within the confines of the city - until the death of the High Priest. If the person goes outside the city before the death of the High Priest, the avenger of blood may kill him. You can see the protection offered in these cities!” Joshua explained.

“Yes I can. I hope Laban will be safe there,” Abiel answered.

“I believe he will. But there is more to learn about the cities of refuge. There is also power in the cities. The person fleeing to one of these cities is to state his case to the elders of the city at the city gate. Then he can enter the city by faith – faith in the elders of that city. The city has the power to save and secure. As long as the accused stays in the city, he is safe. If he leaves the protection of the city, he will be in grave danger from the avenger of blood.

“The position of the cities is important too. Moses instructed me to make the cities accessible to all. They are centrally located throughout the land so no one is ever more than one day’s journey away from them. We made wide, level roads leading to the cities, with clear markers pointing to them to make them easily accessible. And we made them available to all. The city gates remain open day and night and they provide protection to everyone who enters its walls – national citizen or foreigner.

“There is also a picture in the cities. Each of the names of these cities is significant. Shechem means shoulder, or the place where burdens are bore. Abiel, do you see the spot on the back of your neck between your shoulder blades where you would carry a heavy load? That is like Shechem. Shechem is a place where, by faith, we can lay our burdens down and they will be carried for us. The other cities names have powerful pictures of God’s love as well. Kadish speaks of being clean. Hebron reminds us of the fellowship one can experience in a city of refuge. Bezer is like a fortress that one can run to. Ramoth speaks of the heights we are carried to, and Golan is like a circle of protection. All these cities names show the grace of Yahweh and His love for needy people,” Joshua explained.

As they rounded the base of Mount Gerizim and headed toward Shechem, Abiel reviewed all he had learned about the cities of refuge. “So these cities are divinely appointed places for the accused to flee. They are clearly marked for all to see and accessible for all without delay. They offer hope to the guilty!” Abiel recounted.

“I think you’ve got it!” Joshua said as he winked at Abiel.

As they entered the valley between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, Abiel noticed something as he was speaking. “You can really hear well in this valley!” Abiel said loudly, proving his point. “The sound echoes off these canyon walls.”

Joshua smiled and said “there is another important lesson to learn right here, at this very spot!”

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 10

1. Proverbs 18:10 and Psalm 61:3 describe God as a strong tower where we can flee for refuge. How is God like a strong tower?
2. Have you ever had to “flee” to God and seek his refuge? Explain.
3. Read Joshua chapter 20. The cities of refuge in the Promised Land were a “type of Christ” (an Old Testament picture of Jesus). What kind of protection did the cities of refuge offer? What kind of protection does Christ offer us today?
4. What kind of power did the cities of refuge offer? What kind of power does Christ offer us today?
5. The position of the cities of refuge was important. What did the position of the cities of refuge offer a person? How is Christ’s “position” important in our lives? (See Hebrews 10:12 and 7:23-25.)
6. There were pictures of Christ’s character in the names of the cities of refuge. What are they? Which picture ministers to you the most?
7. As Abiel did, re-tell how a city of refuge is like Christ.

Chapter Eleven

A Lesson About Remembering

“We need reminders because memories fade.”

As Abiel continued to marvel at the acoustics of the canyon, Joshua told him to quiet down so that he could explain the significance of where they were.

“Just before we entered this Promised Land, Moses commanded us to do something significant at *this* location. He first instructed me to build an altar right here using uncut stones, and offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. You can see over there is the altar I built after we got here,” Joshua said as he pointed to a pile of rough rocks set up as a table.

Abiel noticed the altar, but what really caught his attention were the very large stones with that looked like writing on them. “I see the altar, but what are those?” Abiel said with a mix of curiosity and excitement.

“Those are the stones on which I wrote the blessings and curses of the Law.”

“Why did you do that?” Abiel asked.

“Let me explain. Moses also commanded me to write down the Law on these large stones so that I could review it for our people. Moses knew this valley between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal would provide a natural amplification system allowing all the children of Israel an opportunity to clearly hear the words of the Law. After I copied the Law onto those stones, I instructed half of the tribes of Israel to camp on Mount Gerizim and the other half to camp on Mount Ebal. I stood in the middle of this valley, at about this spot, and read out loud all the blessings and the curses of the Law. Immediately after I read each phrase, all the priests that were gathered around me would repeat in unison the words I had spoken. This created a loud sound that carried through the canyon and echoed through out the land. Everyone heard it! And after each blessing and curse was read, all the people would shout *Amen!*

“This had a two-fold effect. First, it was an important reminder. It reminded us that Yahweh is a just God and that we need to obey Him wholeheartedly and follow His commands and decrees. But it served another purpose as well. It gave notice to the

surrounding Canaanites that God’s people are here and we would be faithful to His Law. And they could all hear of Yahweh’s promise to give us the land. Most of the curses that I read dealt with the sinful behavior and practices the Canaanite people had fallen into. It was because of their disobedience that God’s judgment was falling on them, and God was going to use *us* to carry out that judgment.”

“And that’s exactly what happened, isn’t it?” Abiel said with excitement.

“Yes, that is exactly what happened. You’ve heard me tell many stories of God’s faithfulness to us in the Promised Land. Stories are great learning tools, but there is something else that helps us learn as well,” Joshua said.

“What is that?”

“Memorials help us learn. Things like stone altars - like *this* one.” Joshua pointed to a large altar and led Abiel to it. “They serve as reminders of God’s love for His children. We need reminders because memories fade. Do you remember how the Shema instructs us to keep verbal and physical reminders of God’s Law constantly in front of us? How God instructed me to not let the Book of the Law depart from our mouths? How we need to meditate on it day and night?” Joshua inquired.

“Yes, I remember.”

As they started to walk again, Joshua continued. “Reminders help us remember - and there are reminders all over this place. Shechem is full of altars of remembrance! This is a place rich in history so I’m glad you accompanied me on my trip here. Yes, this is a *very* special place. This is where Yahweh revealed His covenant to our father Abraham. It is here at Shechem, near the great tree of Moreh that God told Abraham that he would give his offspring this land!”

As they walked a ways further they came upon a large oak tree. “There it is! The *Great Tree* and Abraham’s altar. You see Abiel, Abraham knew the incredible significance of what Yahweh had just revealed to him. So he built this altar to remind all of his future descendants of God’s covenant. God had promised him descendants that outnumber the stars of the sky and the grains of ocean sand. Yahweh had promised him this very land of Canaan that we now occupy. He also promised that we would be blessed to be a blessing to all. This altar reminds us of the covenant God promised to our father Abraham.”

“That is a great reminder. But you said Shechem is *full* of remembrances. What else is there?” Abiel asked.

“Look here, next to the great oak tree. Because God revealed His covenant to Abraham here, this was now considered a holy place. Our father Jacob took a stand for himself and all his family right here as well. He told his entire family to purify themselves and get rid of all their foreign idols. He buried them right under this oak tree. If you look closely, you can still see the mound raised in the dirt. Underneath lie all the idols that Jacob buried. They are under our feet right now! This is a reminder to us to serve God, and God alone.”

Joshua then pointed to another altar nearby. “This plot of land is important too. This is the piece of land that Jacob bought from Hamor, the father of Shechem who established this town many years ago. After he bought this land, Jacob settled here and built this altar. He called it *El Elohe Israel* which means *Mighty is the God of Israel*. It serves as another reminder to us that Yahweh is mighty. But Abiel, there’s more! There’s something else buried nearby.”

The two of them hurried on a little further. Abiel felt like a little boy discovering all sorts of hidden treasures. “Here it is!” Joshua shouted. He pointed to a grave.

“I can see it’s a grave, but who is buried here?” Abiel asked.

“This is the place where Joseph’s bones were laid to rest. As Joseph was dying, he made the children of Israel swear by an oath that they would bring his bones into the Promised Land. After his death, Moses brought Joseph’s bones out of Egypt and the people carried them those forty years in the desert. We carried the bones into the land of Canaan and as soon as we had completely conquered it, we buried them right here, on this very plot of ground that Joseph’s father, Jacob bought. This grave serves as another important reminder of how faithful Yahweh is.”

Joshua and Abiel looked at the spot where Joseph’s bones lay and reflected on God’s faithfulness to the children of Israel over the years. They also discussed how God had been faithful to each of them. As they left Jacob’s plot of land and the great oak tree, the buried idols, and Abraham’s and Jacob’s altars, they headed into the town of Shechem. Joshua had one more story of remembrance to tell.

“Shechem is not the only place around here that has reminders of the attributes of God. Let me tell you about one more. If you ever visit Gilgal, you’ll see one of the most important memorials of all. The *Twelve Stones of Remembrance*. Immediately after we crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land, the Lord told me to do something strange. While the waters of the Jordan were still standing up, God told me to choose twelve men – one from each tribe – to go back into the river bed and bring out twelve large stones to represent each tribe of Israel. When they had brought the stones out, I set them up as an altar that would last forever.”

“Let me guess. To serve as a reminder for the people?” Abiel said smiling.

“Exactly! I knew that those who crossed the river would never forget, but if their children would ever ask what the stones were there for, the parents could tell them of the mighty power of God. It serves as a reminder of how God stopped the rapid waters of the Jordan and made a dry pathway for us into this Promised Land.

“Abiel, it is important to remember all these lessons that you’ve been learning over the past few months. Just as it is important for our people to see these memorials and to remember the love of Yahweh, you too can look around and see His love. You can see it in the beauty of creation. And I believe if you take these lessons to heart, you will be reminded of them often,” Joshua said.

“How so?”

“Well, think about it. The next time you see a water pot, especially if it has a crack in it, you’ll remember that God’s plans are bigger than your plans. The next time you complain about eating the same meal a few times in a week I hope you will remember the lesson you learned about having a grumbling attitude and God’s provision of manna in the desert. Whenever you see a knife I hope you remember how you took my knife and gave it to Zared. He used it to kill the goat, but his sin affected many people.”

“Yes, I know I won’t forget *that* lesson. The next time I see a mountain lion, I’ll remember how God provides us with courage and gives us the provisions we need to get through life - just like He provided the children of Israel with the Ark of the Covenant, and all the reminders in the Ark. And every time I see Crocus flowers I know I’ll remember to slow down and enjoy the beauty of life. I can slow down because I know

that God is not in a hurry. He's more concerned about me becoming the person He wants me to be than in me getting to a destination quickly," Abiel said.

"And the next time you see prayer scrolls and some tools you'll remember the need for balance in life. Work must be balanced with prayer. Both human effort and relying on God are important. And I'll bet if you ever see an antelope near some water, you'll remember that you can learn a lot just by watching, and how important it is to find a mentor for your life. And Abiel, I hope that every time you hear my name, *Joshua*, you'll remember the lesson you learned about humility. It is *God* who works great things through us," Joshua said humbly.

"Yes, I'm sure I will. And now that we're here at Shechem, I know I'll never forget the importance of these *cities of refuge*. It is great that God provides a place where we can run to for shelter and safety," Abiel said.

Joshua and Abiel entered Shechem and Joshua soon finished the business he had with the priest. They returned to Joshua's home near Timnath-Serah. It was only a week later that they received news that Abiel's father, Ben-Ami was returning from his business trip and would be taking Abiel home to Thebez. Abiel's aunt had recently recovered so his mother, Simcha, had been home preparing for her husband and sons' return. While this was exciting news, Abiel couldn't help but realize how much he would miss Joshua.

Soon the day came when Ben-Ami arrived at Joshua's home. Abiel was surprised and a little embarrassed how easily his tears flowed. Yet he didn't know if they were tears of happiness because he had missed his father so much, or if they were tears of sadness because of the pain of leaving Joshua. Perhaps they were both. Joshua had become much more than a distant relative. He had become a close friend and a trusted mentor.

"Abiel, I can't tell you how much it has meant to me that you came here and stayed with me," Joshua said with a gleam in his eye. "I am getting very old now and I don't know how much time I have left here. You being here gave me one more opportunity to pass on the lessons I have learned. I pray that you will take to heart everything you've learned and grow to be the bright man of God He has designed you to be!"

Choked with emotion Abiel tried to speak but couldn't. He gave Joshua a big hug and finally blurted out, "Joshua, *I* am the one who is grateful. You have taught me so many things I will never forget! And I also pray that through these lessons I've learned, I can grow up to be half the man you are."

With those few heart-felt words, Abiel and his father left Joshua. On their way back home to Thebez, they passed through Shechem. Abiel showed his father all the altars and explained the significance of the whole area. He shared with Ben-Ami all the lessons he had learned from Joshua and wondered if he would ever see Joshua again.

The homecoming was one of mixed emotions. Abiel was *so* glad to see his mother. He ran to her and gave her a hug and kiss. He loved both his parents very much. Abiel *was* happy to be home, but he felt as if he had another home, in Timnath-Serah, and another father - Joshua.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 11

1. Read Deuteronomy 27:1-8. Why is reviewing God’s law important? Do you ever have to get in a “special place” to hear God more clearly, as Israel did in the valley between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal? Explain.
2. Have you heard or read any stories (autobiographies) that have been learning tools in your life?
3. How can “memorials” remind us of God’s goodness and power? How are they different than stories?
4. Read Genesis 35:1-4. Have you ever had to “bury any idols” (get rid of hindrances to your faith) as Jacob did at the Great Tree at Shechem years before? Explain.
5. See Joshua 24:32. Can you point to any “grave” or altar that shows how great and faithful God has been to you?
6. Abiel learned many lessons from Joshua, which are recounted in this chapter. Are you one who tends to learn God’s lessons the first time He teaches us, or do you often need to be taught over and over, until you finally “get it?”

Chapter Twelve

Joshua's Lessons Live On

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

It had been twenty years since Abiel had visited Joshua and learned those valuable life lessons. He never forgot the time he spent with Joshua, or the lessons that shaped his life. Abiel was no longer a young boy, but a married man with a beautiful wife and two sons of his own. He was also a successful businessman like his father. Abiel was not only successful, he was happy.

But it wasn't always that way. Shortly after Abiel had returned from his time with Joshua, his life changed for the better. He had never considered himself to be truly happy, but the lessons Joshua taught him had a profound impact on him. He concluded that happiness was not an accident. Nor was it something to be wished for. He determined that wishing didn't accomplish anything. He remembered what Joshua had told him. *Don't wish it were easier, make it better. Don't wish for fewer problems, develop more skills. Don't wish for smaller challenges, acquire more wisdom.* Abiel decided that happiness was something one designs, so he set out to make something of his life.

Joshua had also taught him much about success that helped Abiel as a businessman. Joshua used to say things like: *success is not so much what we have as it is what we become*, and *unless you change who you are you'll always have what you've got*. He taught Abiel that success was nothing more than practicing a few simple principles every day, while failure was simply repeating a few errors in judgment every day. *It is the accumulative weight of our disciplines and our judgments that leads us to either success or failure*, he would often say. Many times Joshua challenged Abiel not to think about what he was getting out of life, but what he was becoming. So, shortly after he returned from staying with Joshua, in a time of serious reflection, Abiel asked himself some important questions. He asked himself, *Who am I spending time with? What are they doing for me? Are they bringing me closer to God or are they dragging me down? Are they helping me reach my life goals? What do they have me saying? What do they have me thinking? And most important what do they have me becoming?* After Abiel had

answered those questions he asked himself a question of even greater importance: *Is that okay?* He concluded that he needed to make some changes in his life and set out to become a better person, following hard after God and becoming the man of God he was designed to be.

Abiel attributed this major change in his life to the lessons he learned from Joshua. For several years he wanted to thank Joshua. He felt he had much to say to him, but the opportunity never presented itself for him to go visit Joshua. Until now.

Word spread throughout the whole region that Joshua was calling all the people of Israel together at Shechem for one final address before he dies. It surprised Abiel that Joshua was still alive. By now he must have been one hundred and ten years old. But it did not surprise him that all Israel would meet at Shechem. With the great acoustics in the valley and the historical significance of that place, it would be the perfect spot for such an address. Abiel also knew this would be the last time he would see Joshua alive, and he felt there were many things he would like to say to Joshua, if he could. So Abiel made plans to bring his family to the gathering.

As Abiel and his family made the trip to Shechem, he told them the story of his trip to Joshua's home when he was just fifteen years old. He recounted all the experiences he had and all the lessons he learned from the wisdom and experience of Joshua. He told his sons that Joshua was an excellent teacher and that he was grateful for the time they got to spend together. It had truly been a life changing experience for him.

As they approached Shechem, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, Abiel told his sons of the trip he and Joshua had taken there some twenty years earlier. He explained the significance of the valley they were in and how, years before his visit to the valley, Joshua had reviewed all the blessings and curses of the Law with Israel at that very spot. As they passed each important alter, Abiel explained their significance to his sons. They set up their camp at the base of Mount Gerizim, close to the center of the valley. He pointed out the great oak tree of Moreh and could even see Joshua from where they were. Joshua looked older and, from the way he was moving, appeared tired.

As Joshua began to speak, all the people of Israel grew silent. They knew this would be Joshua's last address to them and they eagerly wanted to hear Joshua's final

words. Would they be words of encouragement? Correction? Discipline? No one knew - until he finally spoke.

Joshua began by recounting that long ago their forefathers worshiped other gods, and how Yahweh had intervened in Abraham's life and made a covenant with him and his descendants. He told how those descendants were eventually enslaved in Egypt and how Moses led the people to freedom through the Red Sea and the years of wandering the desert. He then told the stories of him leading the people into the Promised Land through the Jordan River and their miraculous victory at Jericho. He continued to tell the stories of the victories over the inhabitants of the land. Most of these stories were familiar to many in the crowds, as they have been retold in many households throughout the area. But it was even more gripping hearing it from Israel's leader who had witness the events firsthand!

Then Joshua's speech seemed to shift from a history lesson to the real reason he was addressing the people. With sincerity in his voice he began his final speech. *As I addressed the elders, leaders and officials earlier, I will tell you now: Be strong and courageous. Be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses. Don't turn aside, to the right or to the left. Follow it whole-heartedly and completely. Do not serve other gods but hold fast to Yahweh, your God!*

The words reminded Abiel of similar words Joshua had spoken to him twenty years earlier. He thought about how, thanks to Joshua, he *had* done those things – followed God whole-heartedly and led his family in serving God alone.

Joshua continued. *Fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the river and in Egypt.* Abiel glanced in the direction of the great oak tree near Joshua and the mound where Jacob had buried his family's idols. He remembered Joshua telling the significance of that spot. He wondered if anyone still had idols and if they would bury them in the same spot. Now Joshua's voice grew more intense as he said, *but if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!*

At once all the people shouted in agreement that they *would* serve the Lord, and Abiel, in his heart, recommitted himself to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. After Joshua

warned the people what a difficult choice this was, he began to draw up a covenant. He told the people that he was recording all of these things in the Book of the Law. Then he began to set up a large stone under the great oak tree - which didn't surprise Abiel at all, knowing Joshua's tendency for reminding people of significant events by setting up monuments. Abiel explained to his sons the significance of that spot just like Joshua had explained it to him years before.

Joshua addressed the people one last time. *This stone will be our witness. It has heard all that we have said here today!* Those were the last words Abiel ever heard from Joshua. After his speech Joshua began dismissing the crowds. Abiel decided they would stay in the region for a few days visiting some friends. Abiel believed Joshua would be very busy in the next few days and hoped he would soon get a chance to meet with him and tell him the things he wanted to say for years. Sadly, he would never get that chance.

Only a few days after the speech, word quickly spread through out the region that Joshua had died. The burial would be in Joshua's hometown of Timnath-Serah. Since Abiel was close by and he *was* related to Joshua, he made plans to attend the funeral with his family. It didn't take long to reach Joshua's hometown. Memories poured into Abiel's mind like rain soaking into the dry desert ground. He was surprised, given Joshua's legendary status, at the small crowd that gathered for the funeral. Abiel recognized a few people. Rahab was there, looking not much older than the last time he saw her. Joshua's long time friend Caleb was there. Abiel told his sons the story of Joshua and Caleb spying out the Promised Land and of their report to the people of Israel. Eleazar was also there. Abiel had heard many stories about how he had given Joshua wise counsel on various matters. Eleazar's son Phinehas, now the High Priest, conducted the ceremony.

Phinehas asked people to speak and share their memories of Joshua. Several did. It surprised Abiel that few shared about what a great military leader Joshua had been. Most of the stories were tender memories of how Joshua had impacted people to follow the Lord. Several shared through laughter and tears, until Phinehas asked if there was anyone else who wished to share. Abiel's heart raced. He knew he would never get another opportunity, and since he didn't get the chance to say these things to Joshua face to face, he concluded that sharing them at his funeral would be the next best thing.

Abiel stepped forward. “My name is Abiel. I am here with my wife and two sons. My father, Ben-Ami of Thebez, was Joshua’s nephew. But Joshua was much more to me than a great uncle. He became a mentor to me in my younger days. But he was much more than a mentor. Despite our age difference, he was my friend. I had the opportunity to spend several months with Joshua when I was a young boy. The time I spent with him changed my life. As many of you know, Joshua loved to tell stories. He told me many. But no story was without purpose. The stories he told me of the lessons *he* learned from Yahweh had a tremendous impact on *me*. He taught me about how big Yahweh is and the importance of attitude. He showed me that prayer and human effort must be balanced and both are necessary to accomplish anything. He taught me vital lessons about the seriousness of sin and the significance of courage. He taught me humility and how we need to remember all the things God is teaching us. And I must tell you, *I have!* I’ll never forget the lessons Joshua taught me when I was a boy. I can honestly say that I am the man I am today because of Joshua. Most importantly though, I want to remind you of the last words I heard him speak, just a few days ago. He reminded us all to *observe all that is written in the Law and serve the Lord with faithfulness!* Those are the words I will leave with you. The same words he spoke to me twenty years ago, and the same words he spoke to all Israel just days ago.”

Abiel felt good that, even though he did not get to tell Joshua how important he had been to him and how much he loved him, he *was* able to express Joshua’s impact on his life, at his funeral. On their way home, Abiel wondered if the lessons he learned from Joshua would be remembered by future generations. His question was quickly answered.

Abiel’s oldest son asked, “Father, I heard you speak of all the stories that your Great Uncle told you as a boy and the things you learned from him. Would you tell me some of those stories?” Abiel smiled, thought of Joshua and said, “I’m glad you asked.”

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 12

1. At the beginning of chapter 12, Abiel reflects on Joshua's words of wisdom about success. How does life development (becoming a better person) help in becoming successful?
2. Abiel learned an important lesson about associating with positive people from Joshua, which led him to ask himself some important questions and think about the kind of people he associated with. Do you have any examples of how people have influenced you (either positively or negatively)?
3. Have you ever known a very wise person who has died? Have they left you with any advice or words of wisdom?
4. Have you ever been on a family trip that has been very special? How about one where you learned something about God or grew closer to him as a result of the trip? Explain.
5. Abiel never got the chance to talk to Joshua again. Have you ever missed an opportunity to do something or say something important to someone? Did that missed opportunity teach you anything? Do you live life differently because of it?
6. Do you personally know anyone who has impacted many, many people for the Lord? Who are they? How did they have such an impact on people?

About the Author

Mark J. Lenz is a pastor, faith-based business owner and church consultant from the Twin Cities. He enjoys snowboarding, wakeboarding, playing guitar and dominating his fantasy football league. Mark lives in Blaine, Minnesota and his greatest joy is spending time with his wife, Carolyn and their three children.



For more information about Mark J. Lenz, please visit www.markjlenz.com