

**St Michael's
Church**
Stoke Gifford



JOSHUA

Taking Ground for God

An Eight-Week Study Guide

for those preaching in the series through July and August 2026

The BOOK OF JOSHUA is a case study in living a courageous life with God. It's a rich catalogue of different ways God provides, leads, strengthens and moves us forward in difficult circumstances or contested spaces. As we study Joshua and his leadership, we'll be looking for spiritual principles that apply in our lives today, and how Jesus fights with us to claim the promises God has for us.

Sermon Series

1. **From Fear into Courage** – Joshua 1:1-11 & 16-18
2. **Same God, New Season** – Joshua 3:1-17; 4:19-24; 5:9-12
3. **How to Win Any Battle** – Joshua 5:13-6:21
4. **The Armour of Righteousness** – Joshua 7:1-13
5. **If You Can't Beat Him, Join Him** – Joshua 9:1-26
6. **The Lord Fights for Us** – Joshua 10:5-15
7. **Claiming Our Inheritance** – Joshua 17:14-18
8. **The Power of Commitment** – Joshua 24:14-28

Using This Guide

Below are some general pointers on how to make the most of this guide for good group discussion. But first a few specific recommendations for this material in particular:

Sunday Sermons

Since this guide is designed to follow our sermon series, each session will include a question or two based on that Sunday's talk. Make sure you've seen or listened to it if you can – not only will it help clarify the questions and the passages, but it will also help you lead the group if most of them have seen it and will be referring to it!

Violence in the Book of Joshua

The book of Joshua is full of drama and adventure, but it is occasionally disturbing. It will bring us face to face with the challenge of violence in the Old Testament and understanding God's role in violence. While we don't have a session specifically on this element of the book it will probably come up in several readings and raise questions throughout the series.

This is a bigger issue than we could tackle in a single session and really benefits from hearing from a few people who have deeply studied and wrestled with it.

Some recommended resources:

- For a short insight into one way of understanding it, check out the **BibleProject video on Joshua**.
- **The Centre for the Study of Bible & Violence** (<https://www.csbvbristol.org.uk/>) tackles questions like the ones raised in Joshua head on with thoughtful biblical study. Their website will point to lots of resources across a range of topics.
- **God of Violence Yesterday, God of Love Today?** by Helen Paynter is a fairly short, but clear, read if you want to dive in a bit deeper.

Using This Guide (cont.)

Each session follows the same basic format which you can adapt as works best for your group. If you're short on time, or meeting online, focus on the **starred** ✨ **questions**.

Don't forget to pray as you start preparing – good small group discussion is more than just a steady flow of conversation or avoiding awkward pauses! Ask God to fill the time and conversation with his Spirit and help you lead well.

1. **Icebreaker.**

Icebreakers – some people love them and some hate them! These are not supposed to be profound or spiritual. They can be useful to help people relax and give space for those who aren't confident with answering questions about the Bible to contribute in a way that feels safe. But please feel free to leave out the icebreakers if they won't particularly help your group.

2. **Discuss Sunday's sermon.**

Ask someone to sum up the sermon if not everyone has heard it. This question might lead to plenty of discussion, and you might cover some of the material from the rest of the questions ahead of time. That's ok!

3. **Read the passage aloud.**

It's a good idea to ask for a volunteer to read, so the group hears less of your voice. Encourage the group to follow along in their own Bibles.

4. **Give people time to look over the passage and digest it.**

Tell people they have a moment or two to read back over the passage and gather their thoughts.

5. **Ask for first impressions.**

This question lets people engage with their immediate reactions to the passage, positive or negative. Give space for people to talk about what they might not understand! Some questions people ask might be difficult to answer in the session, that's ok.

6. **Specific questions on the passage.**

Depending on the time you have available, you could pick which of these questions to ask, change their order, or add your own.

7. **Application question.**

Each session ends with the same question: *What difference will this passage make in your life this week?* This question invites people to apply the passage to everyday life in a very open-ended way. If appropriate, it is a good question to ask everyone to answer in turn. If you do this each week, people will learn to anticipate it and will begin to consider it before the question is asked.

Sermon one

From Fear Into Courage

Joshua 1:1-11 & 16-18

Introduction

Right at the beginning of Joshua's leadership we see God highlight an essential character trait to following his plans: courage. For us today, it's just the same – courage is an essential part of following Jesus. In this session we'll explore the spiritual art of finding courage and leaving fear behind as we follow Jesus.

If people aren't familiar with where Joshua falls in the story of God's people, a little context might help as you start. God led his people (known as the Israelites here) out of slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. When they reached the edge of the land of Canaan (the land God has promised to give them as a new home) they were overwhelmed at the scale of the challenge and didn't trust God to see his promise through. So God kept them in the desert for 40 years, until the generation of leaders who had doubted him had died, promising to lead the next generation instead. Joshua has been Moses' apprentice, and now that Moses has died, is stepping up to the big job of leading God's people into the land they have been waiting for. ***If you haven't already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

Would you rather **a)** drive through central London without map/sat nav, or **b)** walk to Ely without map/sat nav?

Discussion Questions

1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday's sermon?

Turn to Joshua 1:1-11 & 16-18 and ask someone to read it out. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.

2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?

3. God makes a *lot* of promises here. Can you make a quick list of them?

- God also asks Joshua to do specific things. Again, can you make a quick list of the things God asks Joshua to do?

4. Have a look at verses 3 & 6. God is keeping his promise to Moses and the ancestors of the Israelites – even though they have all died before seeing him keep his promise. Does that fit with your idea of keeping a promise? Why or why not?

5. Multiple times Joshua is urged to be courageous, both by God and the people – clearly he needed it!

- What are some of the fears that might be coming up for Joshua? (Possible answers: impostor syndrome, leading into an unfamiliar place, facing opposition, dealing with past failures, the huge scale of the task.)
- Can you identify with any of them in particular, and if so, which one?

6. Courage clearly plays a big role in stepping into God's plans for us. Do you know anyone who strikes you as particularly courageous in their life with God? What are some of the signs that they are courageous?

✶ **7. Jesus echoes this promise to us: ‘And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ (Matt 28:20). And he also charges us not to be afraid: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’ (John 14:27).**

- **Where are your courage levels in your faith these days? Is there anything that is building your courage? Or draining it?**
- **Maybe one to think about, if not answer here: If you lost all your fear of man, what would you do?**

8. Have a look at verse 18 – the people promise loyalty to Joshua in the strongest terms!

- **What difference do you think it makes to be courageous together?**
- **What might we look like as a church family if we were more courageous?**

✶ **9. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?**

Sermon two

Same God, New Season

Joshua 3:1-17; 4:19-24; 5:9-12

Introduction

At the banks of the Jordan river, God demonstrates to Joshua and the people that his power is the same it was before – he is the same God who parted the Red Sea for the generation before them. Even though it is a new season for them, God demonstrates that he is the same. For us today, we have to learn to hold onto the unchanging power of God each time we reach a new season. ***If you haven't already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

On a scale of 1-10, how good are you at finding your way around a new place?
(1 is terrible, 10 is amazing!)

Discussion Questions

1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday's sermon?

Turn to Joshua 3:1-17 and ask someone to read it out. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.

2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?

3. Look at verses 3-4. The people are told to follow the presence of God (the ark of the covenant) – God insists he'll go first because they've never been there before. What does this tell us about God?

4. Have a look at 5:10-12. The manna (God's miraculous, daily provision of bread in the wilderness) stops as soon as they start to eat the produce of Canaan – God's provision looks different in different seasons. Why do you think God likes to provide in different ways?

5. Have a look at 4:20-22. The people are given physical reminders of God's faithfulness and power.

- What stories do you reach back for to remind you of the power and provision of God, either in your own life or in the lives of others?
- Is there a physical object that you could use to remind you of this story?
- Joshua imagines this conversation to take place between generations (v21-22). What could it look like to pass on stories like this as a church family?

6. In what ways do you think we would look different as a church family if we were confident of God's future provision?

7. Have a look at 3:5. Joshua tells the people to get ready for God to do amazing things.

- What could it look like to get ready for God to do amazing things in your life?

8. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?

Sermon three

How to Win Any Battle

Joshua 5:13-6:21

Introduction

In this famous battle, we see Joshua and God's people learn some valuable lessons about surrendering to God's agenda, listening carefully and being obedient, and about the power of worship. Each of these lessons transfer to spiritual principles that are true for our spiritual lives today.

This is also the first session that touches on the issue of violence in the Book of Joshua. If you haven't already, have a look at the resources section at the beginning of this guide. If your group have questions about it, that's totally fine and normal! Give them some space to chat about it, but point them to the resources mentioned above and try to keep the conversation on the study material for now. ***If you haven't already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

Would you rather be in the March of the Penguins, or a marching band?

Discussion Questions

✶ 1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday's sermon?

Turn to Joshua 5:13-6:21 and ask someone to read it out. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.

✶ 2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?

✶ 3. Have a look at 5:13-14. Joshua sees 'the commander of the army of the Lord' - something that Moses had never seen.

- What does this encounter tell us about what God is like?
- Do you think of God as having an army now? Why or why not?

✶ 4. In bowing down, Joshua effectively submits his role of commander to sit under the Lord's commander and lets God set the strategy. Do you find it easy to let God lead the strategy for your life? Why or why not?

5. God gives Joshua specific instructions and a unique strategy for taking Jericho – in fact most battles from this point are fought in different ways. It seems that God's plans are not the same every time, that he has different instructions each time. (We see this dynamic in Jesus too – it seems he was always looking to the Father to know what to do – John 5:17-20).

- What might be some of the reasons for this variety?
- Do you find it easy to listen to God for instructions, or difficult?
- What might change if we got better at listening to God's instructions as a church family?

6. Worship plays a key role in this battle.

- Do you think of worship as a powerful thing? Why or why not?
- How could you bring worship into a difficult area of your life right now?
- What about our collective worship – do you think of that as a powerful thing?
- Is there a way you could invest more in collective worship?

✶ 7. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?

Sermon four

The Armour of Righteousness

Joshua 7:1-13

Introduction

We're looking at a troubling episode immediately after the victory at Jerico, where almost as soon as there is the opportunity for things to go wrong, they do. Joshua and the people of God face firsthand how seriously God takes obedience and the lengths He goes to in order to protect the holiness of his people. While today we are covered by Jesus' forgiveness (praise the Lord!), this is a stark reminder that God is serious about sin and dealing with it in our lives. We'll also look briefly at Ephesians 6:1-17, where Paul talks about righteousness as part of our spiritual armour.

This passage in Joshua will almost certainly throw up some questions about violence – if you haven't already, look at the resources recommended in the Using This Guide section. This is a genuinely troubling and difficult passage, so don't worry if people are troubled by it. It is helpful to know that 'it was usual in the ancient world for a family to be punished collectively for a crime by one person' (Pekka Pitkanen in his commentary on Joshua) when we're thinking about both the way God deals with all Israel for Achan's sin, and Israel deals with Achan and his family. ***If you haven't already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

On a scale of 1-10, how good a spy would you be? And why? (1 is terrible, 10 is amazing!)

Discussion Questions

1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday's sermon?

Turn to Joshua 7:1-13 and ask someone to read it out. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.

2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?

3. Ask someone to read Josh 6:17-19. These are the instructions – and warning! – that Achan didn't heed.

- Do these verses in chapter 6 change the way you feel about our passage? Why or why not?
- Sometimes we do the same thing – fail to heed some of God's obvious instructions and warnings. Why do you think we do this?

4. Achan's seemingly small act of disobedience has a direct impact on all of God's people. Do you think of sin as having that kind of effect today? Why or why not?

5. How do you feel about God's anger here? Do you think it is fair or not? And why?

6. Joshua goes straight to God with his questions and fears (v6) and stays in God's presence. Is this your instinct when things go wrong? Why or why not?

7. Have someone read Eph 6:1-17. The key bit of armour here for our session is the breastplate of righteousness. (If you need a working definition, righteousness can be understood as 'right relationships with God and people,' or 'doing right by God and others.')

- **Warm up question: Do any of the phrases here remind you of Joshua? (Be strong – Josh 1:9; to stand – Josh 7:12).**
- **Do you have a habit of checking your breastplate of righteousness? What might this look like?**



8. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?

Sermon five

If You Can't Beat Him, Join Him

Joshua 9:1-26

Introduction

Our passage this time is all about doing your calculations and considering your options. The Gibeonites take God seriously, consider the alternatives and decide it would be better to be allied with God than on the wrong side of his plans. This spiritual principle of doing your calculations – working out whether you can afford not to be on God's side – is one that Jesus applies for his disciples too. We'll be looking at the Gibeonites as an example of the kind of thinking Jesus talks about in Luke 14:31-33. ***If you haven't already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

On a scale of 1-10, how much do you like fancy dress parties?
(10 is adore them, 1 is hate them.)

Discussion Questions

✶ 1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday's sermon?

Turn to Joshua 9:1-26 and ask someone to read it. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.

✶ 2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?

3. Have a look at v1-3. The Gibeonites realised they could either come against God's advancing kingdom or try to join it however they could.

- What would you have done in their shoes?
- (Bonus question – on a scale of 1-10, how good a Gibeonite delegate would you be?)

✶ 4. Ask someone to read Luke 14:31-33. Give everyone a chance to digest the passage.

- Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?
- Why do you think Jesus puts things so strongly?

5. Because of how God's kingdom was advancing, there were no neutral options for the Gibeonites – and Jesus says the same is true spiritually today. Sometimes we think we can sit on the sideline or in the 'neutral' zone until we feel ready.

- Do you think about God's kingdom as advancing this way spiritually now? Why or why not?
- How do we spot when we're trying to stay neutral?

✶ 6. The Gibeonites took reports of God's power and promises seriously.

- What are some of the signs that we are taking God's power and promises seriously as individuals?
- Or as a church?

7. Jesus talks about the king who 'sat down and considered' (v31). Do you make a habit of considering the big picture sometimes? What could this look like?

✶ 8. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?

Sermon six

The Lord Fights for Us

Joshua 10:5-15

Introduction

Here we see the Lord turn up to fight with and for Joshua and the Israelites in impressive power. Throughout scripture this battle becomes one of the iconic examples for how God fights for his people (e.g. see Hab 3:11, Is 28:21). This picture of God's unequalled power is an enormous comfort to us as we face spiritual battles today. ***If you haven't already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

If you had a 30-hour day at your disposal tomorrow, how would you spend it?

Discussion Questions

✶ **1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday's sermon?**

Turn to Joshua 10:5-15 and ask someone to read it out. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.

✶ **2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?**

3. A quick warm-up question – God uses several means to defeat the army of the five kings. Can you identify them?

✶ **4. What does this passage tell us about what God is like?**

5. Joshua prays one of the outrageous prayers in scripture in v12.

- Where do you think Joshua found the confidence to pray that prayer?
- Do you know anyone who prays with more confidence than you do? Where do you think they draw that confidence from?
- How would we look different if we had confidence like Joshua's as individuals? Or as a church?

6. The Israelites still have to fight here! God holds the sun in place, not so they could have a picnic but finish the fight.

- How do we find perseverance for our battles?
- What helps you persevere? And why?

✶ **7. This is an unusual display of God's miraculous intervention. Does anyone have any stories of God's miraculous intervention, either from your own life, or that has stuck with you from someone else's life? Spend some time encouraging each other by telling stories of God's miraculous power!**

✶ **8. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?**

Sermon seven

Claiming Our Inheritance

Joshua 17:14-18

Introduction

In these few verses is an example of an important spiritual principle – sometimes what God has assigned to us, we have to go and get! God does not drop everything in our laps, but leaves his promises there for the claiming. Paul demonstrates this thinking in Phil 3:10-16 – even though he obviously already knows Jesus, he says he wants to know him, to grab hold of everything. This spiritual dynamic challenges us to stay hungry and press in for more of what God has promised us, even when it's hard work to clear the land. ***If you haven't already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

If you could have an allotment anywhere in the world, where would you want it?

Discussion Questions

- ✻ 1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday's sermon?
Turn to Joshua 17:14-18 and ask someone to read it out. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.
- ✻ 2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn't expect it or don't understand it?
- ✻ 3. Why do you think God gives the people of Joseph their inheritance like this, where they have to work hard for it? What does this tell us about what God is like?
- ✻ 4. Ask someone to read Philippians 3:10-16. Give people a moment to digest it. Does anything jump out at you here?
 - Can you think of anyone who seems good at 'pressing on'? What characteristics do they have?
- 5. What are some of the signs that we've settled with what we have? Either as individuals or as a church? What do you think leads us to settle with what we have: as individuals? Or as a church?
- 6. Joshua here is urging a group to claim God's promise to them collectively (see v. 17). How do you think we could help one another claim God's promises for us?
- 7. Maybe one to think about if not answer here: What areas of your spiritual life do you think God has given you that you haven't 'cleared' yet? And what would you have to tackle to claim it?
- ✻ 8. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?

Sermon eight

The Power of Commitment

Joshua 24:14-28

Introduction

After all that God has done for them, Joshua calls the people to commit to following God going forward, with a pretty stern warning about being naïve. Joshua wants to make sure the people understand God takes them seriously, and they should take their commitment to him just as seriously.

One verse might cause difficulties – v19 sounds like the exact opposite of what we’d expect! One commentator explains Joshua’s point like this: *‘Is it the case that “God will forgive me, it’s his business”? Joshua anticipatorily denies it. But he goes on to make clear that his point is not that people may seek forgiveness and not obtain it (cf. Acts 8:22). It is rather that people cannot assume they can declare independence or ignore God’s expectations and God will not mind. [...] Yahweh is like a father who does not put up with his children’s rebellion.’* (John Goldingay, Joshua, p.427).

Like the Israelites, we are charged to commit one way or the other, either to follow Jesus or not. But Jesus is the greater Joshua – the one whose perfect commitment and obedience makes a way for us to live faithfully for God. Jesus’ faithfulness covers for us, wins forgiveness for us, and enables us to serve God more and more faithfully. We get to join his household!

Since this is the last session, take a little time if you can to reflect on the whole series and what people have found most helpful or impactful. ***If you haven’t already, have a look at the Using This Guide section before you start planning.***

Icebreaker

On a scale of 1-10, how good are you at keeping resolutions? (10 is amazing, 1 is terrible.)

Discussion Questions

✶ 1. Did anything jump out at you from Sunday’s sermon?

Turn to Joshua 24:14-28 and ask someone to read it out. Take a minute or two to digest the passage.

✶ 2. Does anything jump out at you, either because you didn’t expect it or don’t understand it?

✶ 3. In v14, Joshua charges the people to ‘fear the Lord’.

- What do you think he means by this?
- How are we supposed to ‘fear the Lord’ today? In the same way, or differently?
- Where are your ‘fear of the Lord’ levels right now? What helps you ‘fear’?
- What would we look like as a church if our ‘fear of the Lord’ levels were higher?

4. Joshua seems to be giving the people an ultimatum here – a moment to choose, a line in the sand to draw. Do you have a moment like this in your story with God? What happened?

5. Joshua calls them to make their choice for God publicly – a similar moment for us today might be getting baptised. If you have been baptised – when did you decide to do this and why? (If you haven’t – think about it!)

6. What do we learn about God in this passage? Does any of it surprise you?

7. Joshua makes this a serious thing. In what ways can we show God we're serious? How would you show you mean business with the Lord?

 **8. What difference will this passage make to your life this week?**

 **9. This is our last session in Joshua! When you think over all the sessions, does anything stand out as particularly memorable and why?**