

Overwhelmed With Your To Do List?

Joshua 13:1-7

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, October 8th 2023

Last week we looked at the importance of planning. But one of the things that happens when people start planning and looking at all the things that need to be done and put into a schedule is that they get discouraged and overwhelmed. It just seems like too much. And I think this passage has at least *some* of the high level principles that can help those of us who face that from time to time - especially when you are looking at God's big plan for planet earth. What should you do when you have an overwhelming "to do list"? What do you do when you look at all the land that still needs to be conquered and find discouragement creeping in?

I. Don't deny your limitations (v. 1a)

Well, first, you don't deny your limitations. That would be unrealistic. Verse 1 begins by saying, "Now Joshua was old, advanced in years..." And then God is going to remind him that he is old and advanced in years. Why? Why does Joshua need to be reminded of this obvious fact? I think it is because driven people sometimes forget their limits and push themselves too hard. My wife's mom has had four falls in the last month or so, mainly because she still thinks of herself as young. And I appreciate her ambition and energy. But we do need to know our limits and not get discouraged over the fact that we can't do as much as we once did. I have to remind myself of that fact.

How old was Joshua? He died at the age of 110 at the end of the book, so some people place him at about 90 here. Others place him much older - one saying that he was nearly 100. But we really have no way of knowing for sure. The only thing that we know for sure is that the natural process of aging and limitations is recognized by God, and He does not expect older people to do what younger people can do.

But the same principle applies to all of us - and I put myself in the "us" of not being old yet. It's good to recognize our limitations. And if we are getting discouraged that we can't do what x,y,z people are doing, it may be that we are being unrealistic. God didn't make a mistake when He made us with some strengths and some weaknesses. We all have them.

II. Put first things first (v. 1b)

The second thing that I see in verse 1 is that Joshua puts first things first by listening to God. Our weaknesses should drive us back to the Lord in order to make sure that we are in alignment with what *He* is wanting us to do. And this is especially important for those who are people-pleasers. The next phrase says, "And the LORD said to him..." When your to-do list is overwhelming and your strength is feeble, look up from your list to the Lord. Look up

from your inadequacies to the Lord. Put first things first. And even a short prayer will sometimes put perspective on the things that you are overwhelmed with.

And I think Joshua almost always did that. His whole life was devoted to serving God. And you don't have to be a pastor in order to serve God faithfully. He served God as a general of an army. And he put God first in that role. In other words, there is no such thing as a secular role in life if we take Paul's admonition seriously that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do we are to do all to the glory of God. When we do our work for God and take our cues from God, it is easier to avoid discouragement.

During the early days of the Salvation Army (which particularly focused on ministering to the down-and-outers), William Booth and his associates were repeatedly slandered by the media, by certain church leaders, and even by some government officials. When his son, Bramwell, showed Booth the most recent newspaper attack on their ministry, General Booth replied, "Bramwell, fifty years hence it will matter very little indeed how these people treated us; it will matter a great deal how we dealt with the work of God."¹

In other words, when you do your dishes and laundry for the Lord, what others think of you (or even their failure to think of you) won't matter to you nearly as much as what God thinks. When you have no success in convincing a legislator to abolish human abortion, your success or lack of success in convincing that person will not matter as much as God's "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Indeed, listening more to God's voice than you do to culture's voice will enable you to persevere through all the opposition. This is not just theory. God continues to guide His people.

III. Realize that God Himself knows that there will always be more work than one generation can possibly do (v. 1) - develop a long term vision

The third thing that I see here is that God Himself knew that there would be far more work than this one generation would be able to do. We've already seen this in previous passages, but it is good to remind ourselves of this - especially when we are discouraged. Verse 1 goes on, "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed." And then he goes on to list the territories left, some of which would not be taken for another 400 years. Talk about a long term vision!

But it was because Joshua did not let this big vision die that he inspired others to carry on a God-sized vision in the rest of this book. When D. L. Moody was dying, he told his sons who had gathered by his bedside, "If God be your partner, make your plans large." I love that. "If God be your partner, make your plans large." And when your plans are larger than you, you

¹ W. Wiersbe, *The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*, p. 185.

will still do a lot toward accomplishing the overall goal, but you will realize that it's not all up to you, and God will use others in His Israel to carry on the vision too.

And by the way, it is easy to lose God's big vision for planet earth when we feel overwhelmed. But it is maintaining a big vision and passing on a great vision that keeps the church advancing. When William Burns was a young boy, he visited Glasgow for his first time and got separated from his mother. The mother frantically searched for him and found him sitting in an alley sobbing. When his mother asked him what ailed him, he said, "The thought of these Christless feet on the way to hell breaks my heart." Even as a kid he was gripped by a huge God-centered, God-sized vision. And he never lost it. All he could do as a kid was pray and witness occasionally. But that vision turned him into one of the mightiest revivalist preachers in Scotland. Now, God has not called most of you to be revivalists. But He has called you to have a vision that is bigger than you. That's guaranteed. He has called all of us to a vision that is bigger than us. We've got to make sure that our inabilities do not reduce our God-given calling and God-given vision to ashes. There are ups and downs in our lives. There are ups and downs in history, and we certainly seem to be entering into a down period of judgment. But that should not discourage you in the least. Even that can be part of God's overall plan to advance His cause. You cannot change hearts, but as D. L. Moody said, "If God be your partner, make your plans large." God is honored by that.

IV. But still learn about and take interest in the work of future generations (v. 2a)

The next thing that I see here is that even though Joshua himself could not do much more active fighting, God wanted him thinking about the details of the future work. Verse 2 says, "This is the land that yet remains..." and then he gives the details. If God does not intend Joshua to take that land, why is He giving Joshua all these details?

I can think of two reasons. First, it enabled Joshua to pray these promises into their future existence - and it is good to pray about things that go beyond our lifetime. Second, it cast a vision for that future work to the next generation. Both of those remind us that God doesn't put the whole burden upon our own shoulders. But it also shows the future generation that we care about them and are with them in their work. We are cheering them on.

So, what are some practical ways that we can take an interest in the land yet to be taken by future generations? Or another way of asking the question is, what are some ways that we can hear God's heart for the nations? I'll just share two ideas - one on the global level and the other on the family level.

On the global level of the land yet to be conquered by the Gospel, there are many missions resources out there that can help to inform us and stir up our prayer life. This is one that I really like. It is *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone.² I mentioned this resource last week.

² It is available still on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/Operation-World-Definitive-Prayer->

For each country it gives statistics on geography, population, languages, literacy rates, economy, what religions are there, and all kinds of other helpful facts. It's a fantastic basis for both prayer and missions. And I have many other books that are a little bit newer³ and that give the contours of what is left on the command to disciple all nations. No one person, church, or denomination can do this work. This is a work that will require the whole church for many generations. But I love the vision of these people who do not give up. They are taking an interest in, researching, and passing on information concerning the land that is yet to be taken. I get encouragement that we are not alone when I read stuff like this.

But even on a smaller scale, we can do the same thing with our children. We can try to learn about the callings of our children so that we can better pray that God will bless their vision. We can take an interest in their homeschooling, their ministry, their business, and their involvement in culture.

V. Communicate your heart burdens to the next generation (vv. 2b-6a). This is leadership succession

The next point encourages us to think about leadership succession. Giving this information to the next generation was a part of the leadership training that he had been doing for the past several years. There were plenty of men who had worked with him who would be able to carry the relay torch and to never give up the vision. It was this vision that drove more conquests in the next chapters, and matured the people who would serve as the next leaders.

Even though Gary and I are still young at 68 and older, we have been working diligently on raising up leaders to carry the torch in the next generation. Pray that the Lord would help us to be effective at this. When you get to our age, you start thinking seriously about who is

Nation/dp/0830857249/ref=sr_1_9?crd=VLS9CT0I74M4&keywords=Patrick+johnstone+operation+world&qid=1696539489&srefix=patrick+johnstone+operation+world%2Caps%2C130&sr=8-9

³ Two excellent ones are *Pray for the World* https://www.amazon.com/Pray-World-Prayer-Resource-Operation/dp/0830836861/ref=sr_1_10?crd=2RXZ3S026VJUP&keywords=Patrick+johnstone&qid=1696539314&srefix=patrick+johnstone%2Caps%2C151&sr=8-10 and *Window on the World* https://www.amazon.com/Window-World-Operation-Resource-Resources/dp/0830857834/ref=pd_bxgy_img_sccl_1/143-2311636-7451067?pd_rd_w=jwdVP&content-id=amzn1.sym.21b577c4-6435-4581-8b53-49da41e27328&pf_rd_p=21b577c4-6435-4581-8b53-49da41e27328&pf_rd_r=QENMQYDM4K6P4B6AH3CX&pd_rd_wg=Dh6RT&pd_rd_r=9646e828-0cad-4822-ba34-d5e27febb475&pd_rd_i=0830857834&psc=1

going to take your place. I hope to be in the saddle for many years to come, but whether that is true or not, we must be raising up leaders. But they must be the *right* leaders.

VI. Never lower the high calling of God's "all" statements (vv. 2-6)

And Gary and I have in no way lowered the standard or lowered the vision that the Lord has laid on our hearts. The series of sermons on the foundations of our worldview still stand,⁴ and we hope will spread. Our vision is an impossibly big vision - it's a postmil vision. But so was Joshua's. And he illustrates the next point, which says, "Never lower the high calling of God's 'all' statements." Let's read verses 2-6 again, emphasizing how big this vision really was.

Josh. 13:2 This is the land that yet remains: *all* the territory of the Philistines and *all* that of the Geshurites, 3 from Sihor, which is east of Egypt, as far as the border of Ekron northward (which is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines—the Gazites, the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites; 4 from the south, *all* the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians as far as Aphek, to the border of the Amorites; 5 the land of the Gebalites, and *all* Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon as far as the entrance to Hamath; 6 *all* the inhabitants of the mountains from Lebanon as far as the Brook Misrephoth, and *all* the Sidonians—they I will drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide it by lot to Israel as an inheritance, as I have commanded you.

We see hints in the rest of this book and in the book of Judges that many Israelites tried to reduce this commission to something more achievable. But God rebuked them when they removed the "all" statements from His commission to them. And I believe God's rebuke rests upon the modern church which has to a great degree diminished the "all" statements of the Great Commission and as a result has diminished its greatness. Let me read you the Great Commission so that you can see that it is just as great (if not greater) than the commission given to Moses and Joshua. This is Matthew 28:18-20.

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you all the days, even to the end of the age. Amen.

Because Christians cannot conceive of a completely Christianized world, they fudge on every single one of the four "all" statements in the Great Commission. For example, some act as if Christ has all authority in heaven, but not necessarily all authority on earth. What

⁴ These can be found here <https://biblicalblueprints.com/list/series/Foundations>

do I mean by that? Well, they exclude Him from their philosophy of civics, opting instead for natural law, conservatism, and some other secular ideas. They exclude His Word from science. They exclude Christ from their entertainment. Would they be willing to have Jesus involved with them in the entertainment that they pursue? He did like to relax, after all. But that's a good test. Would you disinvite Jesus from your entertainment? Do they exclude Christ from their procreation, from their sports, etc. You see, if we have a God-sized vision, we will not be satisfied until *all* human authority submits to the Lordship of Jesus, *all* nations are disciplined, *all* Scripture is followed, and *all* of Christ's gracious presence and resources are claimed for *all* of the days. Anything less than an expectation of total victory for King Jesus in history does not do justice to the all-encompassing mandate of the Great Commission. It does not. The Great Commission has not yet been fulfilled, so we have a lot of work left to do. But He is not making us do it alone. The literal rendering of verse 20 is that He has promised to be with us all of the days (which includes right now).

VII. Be encouraged that all of this is achievable by God's grace (v. 6b)

So don't get discouraged by the greatness of our task. Get excited that this is a task that our Almighty God is up to. *He* does the driving out and the giving of the land. *He* does the judging and the converting. *He* empowers our witness to neighbors and our teaching of children. And just as the Great Commission promises the power of Christ's presence to be with us, the second half of verse 6 promises that Joshua's commission would be achievable by God's presence. God says in verse 6, "them I will drive out from before the children of Israel..." Yes the children of Israel would be involved, but it was still *God* who would bless their efforts and *God* would drive the remaining Canaanites out. It was because of this promise that Joshua's commission was achievable and indeed *was* achieved by the time of King David - ten generations later. That may seem like a long time to wait, but God's got a postmil perspective of many generations. We don't need to worry about God's timing, but let's certainly believe that the task is achievable. Paul prayed in Ephesians 1 that the church there would have their eyes opened (as he worded it) so that

...you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

He says that this is the power that has been promised to accompany our commission. Yes it is an impossible commission *for us*, but it is *not impossible when Christ is working through us*.

VIII. Claim the land by faith long before it is taken (vv. 6c,7)

And based on those promises, the last point makes sense - "Claim the land by faith long before it is taken." When we really believe God's promises concerning the future, it will impact how we plan and act. We will start preparing for that conquest. I have had people wonder why on earth I would write a book on Biblical civics when no nation is going to take it seriously. Well, there are four reasons why I am doing so. First, I love God's plan and want others to love it. Second, current nations need prophetic rebuke from the Bible just like the nations in Biblical times did. Third, God has prospered such rebuke down through the past 2000 years with repentance of kings and the eventual Christianization of nation after nation. He could do so again. But He uses means. I want to supply those means. And fourth, once those nations became Christian, they started implementing the blueprints that earlier church theologians had discovered and written about. I want to write about as many foundational blueprints as I can for whatever nations become Christian in the coming years.

In the past, Christians were successful in converting nations because they had a vision big enough to lay claim to the territories yet to be conquered by the Gospel. They did not let their vision be clouded by what others said was possible. They claimed what God promised, knowing that our God is a God who cannot lie. And they accomplished the impossible because God loves to work through people of faith. Look at what St. Patrick did to Ireland, and St. Columba to Scotland, and St. Augustine to England, and St. Boniface to Germany, and St. Ansgar to Scandinavia, and St. Cyril and Methodius among the Slavic nations. These were men who claimed the land by faith long before the land was even remotely taken. They claimed it for Christ.

Now, the Christianization of the West didn't happen overnight, but within 300 years of the close of the Canon, the entire Roman empire was at least nominally Christianized. That's from total paganism to fairly Christianized. And God can do that again. But He has chosen to do that kind of advance through people of faith. Yes, there was still much that needed to be done, but you can see what can happen when people have a big vision. But should God grant some nation repentance in our own day, I want to start preparing some blueprints for that nation - not just civics, but what every area of life should look like under Christ. And I praise God that He is raising up a host of others who are doing similar things.

So next time you are overwhelmed with the tasks that God has given you to do, don't deny your limitations. God placed you within a body, so you are not in this alone. And He has promised to never give you more than you can handle. So if you have more than you can handle, it may be that you have taken on tasks that God has not given to you. When you know your limitations, you know what you can say "No" to. God was going to have Joshua start saying "No" to some of the hard work of conquest.

Next, look to Jesus for His anointing on each and every task.

Next, after you have done your best and still cannot say you are finished, realize that there is tomorrow, and the day after, and that the world will not fall apart if you do not meet everyone's expectations. There will still be work waiting for you when you wake up

tomorrow. So take it all in stride and try to break down the tasks with the time that God has given *you*.

Next, don't take on the next generation's work, but do take an interest in it. Be convinced of the Greatness of the Great Commission. Show interest in your children's callings, their plans, their homeschooling, their involvement in culture. Bless them and bless their vision. Pray for them. Resource them. We need to think way beyond our own generation.

Next, make sure you take the time to communicate the big vision to your children and help them to know how to communicate it to their children. Prepare your children to succeed *you*.

Next, by refusing to lower the standards of God's "all" statements, it will force you once again to look to *God's* power, *God's* wisdom, and *God's* grace.

That will in turn convince you that we *can* do the impossible *through* God.

And finally, begin claiming your possessions by faith. The "Name-it-and-claim-it" movement have gone too far - especially since their goals tend to be man-centered. But have we gone too far in the other direction by failing to claim the miraculous? I think so. Take a simple thing like a conundrum that you are facing in your family, and you are perhaps not quite sure which direction to go. James 1:5 says that you can claim a wisdom that is greater than your own - a wisdom that you do not yet possess. Don't lower that promise. James 1:5 promises, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." If you ask in faith, it will be given to you. And what is true of wisdom is true of everything else He has promised us as tools to advance His cause. Don't diminish God's commission or be overwhelmed by it. Look to the God of Joshua and keep pressing on. Amen.