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Spiritual Markers
Joshua 4:1-24
February 28, 2016, Jeff Germo
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(Nathan and Annie to read)
Joshua 4 (NLT)

¹When all the people had crossed the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, ²“Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. ³Tell them, ‘Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight.’ ”

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⁴So Joshua called together the twelve men he had chosen—one from each of the tribes of Israel. ⁵He told them, “Go into the middle of the Jordan, in front of the Ark of the Lord your God. Each of you must pick up one stone and carry it out on your shoulder—twelve stones in all, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

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⁶We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ⁷Then you can tell them, ‘They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant went across.’ These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever.”

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⁸So the men did as Joshua had commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River, one for each tribe, just as the Lord had told Joshua. They carried them to the place where they camped for the night and constructed the memorial there. ⁹Joshua also set up another pile of twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the place where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant were standing. And they are there to this day.

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¹⁰The priests who were carrying the Ark stood in the middle of the river until all of the Lord’s commands that Moses had given to Joshua were carried out. Meanwhile, the people hurried across the riverbed. ¹¹And when everyone was safely on the other side, the priests crossed over with the Ark of the Lord as the people watched. ¹²The armed warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh led the Israelites across the Jordan, just as Moses had directed.

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¹³These armed men—about 40,000 strong—were ready for battle, and the Lord was with them as they crossed over to the plains of Jericho. ¹⁴That day the Lord made Joshua a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites, and for the rest of his life they revered him as much as they had revered Moses. ¹⁵The Lord had said to Joshua, ¹⁶“Command the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant to come up out of the riverbed.”

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¹⁷So Joshua gave the command. ¹⁸As soon as the priests carrying the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant came up out of the riverbed and their feet were on high ground, the water of the Jordan returned and overflowed its banks as before. ¹⁹The people crossed the

Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. Then they camped at Gilgal, just east of Jericho.

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²⁰It was there at Gilgal that Joshua piled up the twelve stones taken from the Jordan River. ²¹Then Joshua said to the Israelites, “In the future your children will ask, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ²²Then you can tell them, ‘This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’

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²³For the Lord your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and he kept it dry until you were all across, just as he did at the Red Sea when he dried it up until we had all crossed over. ²⁴He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the Lord’s hand is powerful, and so you might fear the Lord your God forever.”

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This is number four out of six in our *Crossing Jordan* series. Let me get you up to speed just in case you weren't here for the first three sermons. The Israelites had been in captivity as slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. They were brutally oppressed and cried out to God to deliver them. God raised up Moses who freed them through a whole bunch of miracles God performed to show Egypt that he was in charge.

The grand finale miracle he performed after they had finally been freed was parting the Red Sea so they could cross over on dry land and escape the Egyptian army who were pursuing them, and who got swallowed up by the sea when it closed in on them once the Israelites were safely on the other side.

God, unmistakably, rescued them; so they celebrated by shouting and singing and playing their tambourines loudly, shouting praises to God. No sooner did they praise God than they began to complain about not having enough food or water. God provided for them. They complained again and God continued to provide. More complaining. Eventually God got tired of their whining because it showed a complete lack of trust and he said their punishment would be to wander in the wilderness until that generation had died off.

After forty years the only ones left from the first generation were Joshua and Caleb. They are finally crossing over the Jordan, as we saw last week, to take the land God had promised them almost seven hundred years prior. That was last week's sermon. Today we continue the crossing.

This was another great miracle of God and he wanted to make sure they never forgot it. He tells them to take some stones from the river to set up as memorials so when they looked at them they would be reminded how God had been faithful to them.

I have told you at various times of experiences in my life where God has taught me things about myself and about him. He has taken his sculptor's mallet and chisel to shape my character to look more like Jesus. I have recorded most, if not all of these monumental times, in journals. They are spiritual markers that document God's Spirit sculpting my life, taking me from immaturity to maturity; and he is still working on me. This change doesn't happen overnight, and I still have a long way to go.

Usually, not always, but usually they were painful times where God showed me that the paradigm in which I was living was wrong, and if I didn't change my thinking, and even my beliefs that drove my behaviour, I would go on damaging myself and those around me.

When I go back and read my journals, which I do a couple times a year, I can draw a line from all of these spiritual markers and kind of connect the dots to see what God has been doing in my life, where he is leading me, how he is shaping me, and how he has always been faithful.

Journaling my spiritual progress has been a very important part of my spiritual transformation. And I would venture to say, as far as I still have left to go in my walk toward the heart of God for my life, I would not have learned many of the things about myself and about God, had I not taken the time to sit down and be quiet with the Lord with pen in hand and my Bible on my lap or table, allowing God's Spirit to stick his probe into my heart to see what was really there. What were my motives for doing the things I did and pursuing the things I pursued? Were they for my glory or for his?

Many times in my life I have had to change my thinking, beliefs, behaviours, or direction because in those times the scalpel in the hand of God would not allow me to go on. If I had continued as I was I wouldn't have lived my life with integrity. It is the record of these events in my life that have helped me the most in my spiritual transformation. It has been in looking back at these records that I can recall the faithfulness of God in my life which, in turn, has given me reason to believe that God will continue to be faithful in the situation I am currently facing.

In Joshua 4 when God told Joshua to set up the memorial stones, it was for the same reason; so they would remember what God had done for them and take courage for the road ahead, which would be difficult.

When God rescued the Israelites from captivity in Egypt he said, "Remember how I did this. Remember the great things I have done for you. Remember the plagues. Remember how I parted the Red Sea. Remember how I fed you and gave you water to drink in the desert, and how your clothes never wore out. Remember how I helped you defeat armies that were greater than you. Remember — I am Yahweh."

Why was this so important?

Joshua 4:21-24 (NLT)

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21 Then Joshua said to the Israelites, "In the future your children will ask, 'What do these stones mean?' 22 Then you can tell them, 'This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' 23 For the Lord your God dried up the river right before your eyes, and he kept it dry until you were all across, just as he did at the Red Sea when he dried it up until we had all crossed over.

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24 He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the Lord's hand is powerful, and so you might fear the Lord your God forever.

There are two reasons why these spiritual markers are important, not only for the Israelites back then, but also for us now.

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1. **They are a reminder of God's trustworthiness.**

The Israelites would be facing down some more fears very soon. They would have many seemingly impossible circumstances in which they would have to depend on God. These spiritual markers serve as a reminder that if God could do it once he can do it again.

If we are going to live the life God has called us to we will have to remember the things God has done in the past so we know he is big enough for whatever we will face tomorrow. Remember, we have already established that God calls us to something we cannot do without him. If that is true we will need constant reminders that he is good for what he said he would do.

The second reason these spiritual markers are important is:

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2. **So other people will know that it is the hand of God.**

24He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the Lord's hand is powerful, and so you might fear the Lord your God forever."

If you are like me, you like to be noticed. I think we all do. God has actually stamped in our hearts the need to be significant. As with every good thing God has given us, that need to be significant is, many times, twisted by sin so we pursue significance in unhealthy ways that don't include God. Usually when we do that we have a tendency of drawing attention to ourselves. "Look at me," we say, just like a 3 year old child on a swing wanting to be noticed by her parents. Spiritual markers serve as a reminder that it is the hand of God in our lives that gives us significance.

Let's take a look at these two reasons why spiritual markers are important and what that means to us today. First of all, what do I mean by a spiritual marker in today's sense of the word?

When God does something significant in our lives do we set up piles of stones to remind us of that event? If that was the case our yards would be filled with piles of rocks. I suppose the contemporary version of these kinds of memorials would be our memories on Facebook. As a matter of fact, Facebook will bring up some of your memories without you even asking and suggest that you repost them as reminders of the last year's events. I usually don't do that because my life isn't really all that exciting for other people to see.

But, I do that personally with my journaling. You may choose to do something different to mark these points in your life.

I journal most days of the week when I have my quiet time alone with Jesus. I take my journal and my Bible and I let God speak to me. Now, just because I do this doesn't mean I am spiritual or mature. Doing this, or any other spiritual discipline is not a measure of maturity, but what it does is **get me in the way of God's grace** so his Spirit can work in my heart.

When we read, study and meditate on Scripture, or pray, or fast, or have quiet times we need to remember why we are doing these spiritual disciplines. It's not just to fill our heads with information about God. These things are not spiritual in and of themselves. We need to make sure this is perfectly clear. The purpose they serve is to get us in the way of God's grace. They focus our hearts and minds on Jesus. We are all recipients of God's grace in one way or other, but he has so much more for us than we usually settle for.

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As C.S. Lewis in "The Weight of Glory" (1949) wrote, ***"If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."***

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Ephesians 1:3 (NLT)

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

So, when I have my quiet time I place myself in the way of God's grace so his Spirit can work in my heart. Jesus has blessed us; past tense. But, he is also blessing us, and we need to be purposeful about receiving from him.

What I try to do most days in my quiet time is read through the Bible systematically asking the Holy Spirit to speak to my heart and show me areas in my life that need to be dealt with. Were there ways I did not trust him? Was there irrational fear in my life? Were there ways I did not reflect the character of Christ? Was I unloving, or unkind, or impatient, or overbearing, or uncaring? I write these down, and I ask the Spirit to transform my thinking so it becomes like his.

Also, how has God been faithful to me in recent days? What answers to prayer have I seen? How has he helped me overcome fears? How has he helped me love and serve people I normally wouldn't. How has he helped me step out of my comfort zone? How have I seen God's goodness?

These are my spiritual markers. Or I might read through some scripture and meditate on it and have one of those aha moments. God speaks to me through his Word. I write it down. This is a spiritual marker. Or maybe I go through a particularly difficult time and God uses that pain to teach me something about himself or myself, or about others. I record all of these in my journal and they become spiritual markers.

And then a couple times a year, at least, I read through my journal from the previous year and remind myself what God has been doing in my life. How has he been faithful? What has he been teaching me? This is called training. Paul said we are to train ourselves in righteousness.

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I said it before, and I will say it again, **we will not coast into discipleship or maturity.** It will not happen unless we are purposeful about it.

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1 Timothy 4:6–8 (ESV)

6 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

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2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Jesus has called us to train with him as his disciples. Training is hard work. An athlete who is training for a marathon puts herself under a very strict regimen of exercise and diet and rest so she will be ready for the race. She doesn't show up on race day without the proper preparation. That is what the spiritual disciplines are for.

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They are not **evidence** of maturity or spirituality. If we define spiritual growth as something other than what God meant for it to be we will settle for substitutes that are dangerous to ourselves, others around us, our relationship with God, and the church. **The spiritual disciplines simply put you in the way of God's grace so his Spirit can do his work in your heart.**

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The evidence of maturity, as we have said many times is that we are growing to love God and people in ever increasing amounts. When we have a quiet time with God it puts us right in the path of God's grace. We purposefully sit there and receive from God, so his Spirit can transform our hearts and minds. The second reason for the spiritual markers in our lives is:

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2. **So that other people will know that it is the hand of God, and not us.**

Joshua 4:24 (NLT)

24 He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the Lord's hand is powerful, and so you might fear the Lord your God forever."

When we are purposeful about our discipleship others should be able to see a change in us. Last week, Ryan told us about changes God was doing in his life and how others were noticing the changes and their lives were in turn being changed by Jesus. These also are spiritual markers.

If we have a history of a critical spirit, or anger in our heart, or impatience you can bet that others notice it. When we allow ourselves to get in the way of God's grace he will reveal those things to us. We then go into training with the Holy Spirit as our coach and as the source of our power to change. People will see that change and ***know that the hand of the LORD is mighty***. That is what Ryan said happened to him.

There is nothing more beautiful than a transformed life. And the glory for such a life goes completely and 100% to Jesus, so others will ***know that the hand of the LORD is mighty***. He is the hero of the story. The greatest testimony to the grace of God is a changed life. I love hearing stories like this in our Growth Group. It is so faith building. These are spiritual markers we can look at and gain hope and faith to walk forward in the face of difficulty.

This is exactly why we have our Growth Groups. We don't just study the Bible to gain more information about God. Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees for this kind of hypocritical study of the Word. We grapple with God's Word in community so he will change us so we are more able to love those around us.

When someone in your work place or in your family, or your neighbourhood witnesses a change in you they will stand up and take notice. And they may mention something about the change in your behaviour or attitude. They may notice that you are less angry, or impatient and comment on it. These are spiritual markers in your life.

And then, as 1 Peter 3:15 says, that at that time you are supposed to open your mouth and give an answer for the change.

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1 Peter 3:15-16 (NLT)

...you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.

I told you a few weeks ago that I went from being, what Ryan called a 007 Christian, or an undercover Christian, to an obnoxious Bible thumper who shoved his beliefs down the throats of unsuspecting victims. I hadn't digested the next part of this passage.

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¹⁶But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.

Friends, this is God's call on our lives, to be purposeful about our discipleship, to bring ourselves, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, from spiritual immaturity to spiritual maturity and to bring others with us on this walk of faith. This process, called discipleship, or spiritual transformation, is the means by which God, in his grace and through his Spirit, teaches us to love him and people in ever increasing measure.

And believe me, when others around us see this happen they will stand up and take notice and they will see that the hand of God is powerful. But, mark my words, it will not happen by accident.

This will look different for each of us, because God will speak to us according to the personality and temperament he has given us. But, no matter what spiritual disciplines we use to grow in your faith, we will have to purposefully place ourselves in the way of God's grace and allow his Spirit to transform our minds and hearts.

John Ortberg in his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted* puts it this way.

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“Our primary task is not to calculate how many verses of Scripture we read or how many minutes we spend in prayer. Our task is to use these activities to create opportunities for God to work. Then what happens is up to him. We just put up the sails: ‘The wind [or the Holy Spirit] blows where it chooses...”

God wants to work in our every day experiences to transform us, in our interactions with people around us, in our times of silence, in our times of anxiety, in every moment of every day.

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Our task is to purposefully posture our hearts and minds so we can recognize what he is doing in these moments and to mark those times so we are, **1. reminded of God's faithfulness** and, **2. so others will know that it was the hand of God and see Jesus in us.**

Today, after the service, we are going to have a church budget meeting. Before the meeting we are going to eat together. Did you know that eating together was something that first century Christians did a lot? Acts 2:42-47 talks about this.

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Acts 2:42–47 (NLT)

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

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⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

They met with each other often, and along with devoting themselves to teaching, fellowship, and prayer, they devoted themselves to eating together with great joy and generosity, praising God. We need to do more of this. That's why at the end of each sermon series we are going to have a Remember and Celebrate potluck where we can do just that, praise God joyfully and remember what he has done.

It's so easy to complain about things; we simply need to do what comes naturally. Let me tell you, God abhors that. He would rather hear us celebrate his goodness together because when we do that the same thing that happened in the first century will happen to us.

“And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.”

How many of you want to see that here at Campbell River Baptist Church? Nothing would please me more. So please, if you can, join us today, even if you aren't a member, and celebrate what God has done in the last year. Let's look forward with eyes of faith to the possibilities of 2016 if we cooperate with Jesus.



Crossing Jordan IV
Spiritual Markers
Joshua 4
Week of February 28th, 2016

Objective of this study: To understand the purpose of spiritual markers and put them into practice.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

- A. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
- B. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
- C. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 143:1-10** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

What are some big “red letter” events in your life in the last five years?

Word (20 - 30 minutes)

- A. What stood out from the sermon?
- B. Read Joshua chapter 4.
- C. What jumps out at you in this passage?
- D. What was God's purpose(s) for getting the Israelites to make the memorials?
- E. Look at verses 13-17. How is God the hero here? How did that affect Joshua's leadership? How did God establish Joshua? How did Joshua respond?

Work (30 - 45 minutes)

Sermon Quote: ***“When God rescued the Israelites from captivity in Egypt he said, “Remember how I did this. Remember the great things I have done for you. Remember the plagues. Remember how I parted the Red Sea. Remember how I fed you and gave you water to drink in the desert, and how your clothes never wore out. Remember how I helped you defeat armies that were greater than you. Remember I am Yahweh.”***

- F. Why is it important to remember?
- G. We don't usually make piles of stones to help us remember God's faithfulness. What are some things we can do to purposefully help ourselves remember?
- H. What are some ways you have seen God work in your life, or in someone else's life recently that has built your faith?

Sermon Quote: ***“Our task is to purposefully posture our hearts and minds so we can recognize what he is doing in these moments and to mark those times so we are, 1.***

reminded of God's faithfulness and, 2. so others will know that it was the hand of God and see Jesus in us."

- I. What are some spiritual disciplines that you would like to add to your life to help you grow in maturity and your relationship and trust in God?
- J. How has God been faithful to you in recent days? What answers to prayer have you seen? How has he helped you overcome fears? How has he helped you love and serve people you normally wouldn't. How has he helped you step out of your comfort zone? How have you seen God's goodness?
- K. This week think about some of these questions (in "J") and journal about them.
- L. Spend the rest of the time remembering and celebrating. Sing some songs of praise to God.