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The Invitation

Joshua 1:1-9

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There's something very powerful in being invited into something bigger than ourselves. All of us in here, I think, no matter what our age, yearn for that, hope for that, look for that, wait for that call that says, "Come run with us. Come ride with us," right? When our oldest was in 5th grade he had his heart set on playing on a small-fry basketball team. And at that time and probably still is for 5th, 6th, 7th graders, the small-fry league was the deal. They played out on North 27th in a small, loud gym and it was a riot going to games. You were close enough, as a parent you could really influence the game, right, and yell at the refs and all that, but a very intense kind of league—a lot of kids trying out. He had his heart set on it so he went through the tryouts and the coaches—a lot of kids there—and the coaches said, "If you're in, we'll give you a call by 6:00, and if we don't call you by 6:00, you didn't make it." I'll never forget that. When we came home, it was about 4:30. He grabbed a drink, turned on the TV, sat on the floor, instructed us not to talk to him, had the phone right by his knee, and he waited...and waited. And as the minutes went by, this agonizing kind of reality started to set in for us and when the clock hit 6, he burst into tears and he was just devastated. And the devastation of that moment was replaced a week later, when he tried out for another team and made it and got the call, and the self-talk went from, "I'm no good," to "I'm awesome! I'm the greatest player ever!" —all because of the power of a phone call, all because of the power of an invitation. I'm guessing if we had time to think about this, you all could remember a time and a moment when you got that call or didn't get the call or had that conversation and what it did in terms of inspiring you and getting excited to be invited into something bigger than ourselves.

Years back, as I was thinking about this, one thing I rarely got invited into by friends or foe was the game of golf—never got the call somehow. I had great friends and a lot of them golfed and I just never made it. At the time I was in Youth for Christ and we ran fundraising golf tournaments and, you know, it was something I needed to get better at because it was embarrassing. I was embarrassing myself, and I knew there was a reason they didn't call me. My game hadn't got better in twenty years. Since high school I never improved somehow, and never got better. And so I made a New Year's resolution that I'm going to get at least good enough that I won't embarrass myself if I ever do get called from someone to actually go play golf and have fun. So I took lessons, worked on it, got a little better, and that summer a good friend was in town from Phoenix and said, "Hey, some buddies and I are going up to a country club in Omaha. Do you want to go?" This is my moment—this is it—got the big call! So I'm excited. What I realized as we were going up there was that these guys are good. I knew Travis was good; the others were good as well. One of the guys that joined us was John Knicely, the newscaster up in Omaha, and I'm thinking: *good networking opportunity*. I knew the Knicely's, at the time, were involved in Youth for Christ up in Omaha so we could do some talking. What I also learned is that he was a "scratch golfer", a par golfer, and so before we even set foot on the course, I was tight and getting nervous. And when I saw the course and could see where the houses are—right up there—I'm like, "I'm dead. I'm dead where I stand." (*laughter*) So, we start the round and my game deteriorates quickly. Into the 7th hole I'm hitting right off the tee box, left, anywhere but where you need to go. In the meantime, Travis, this friend of mine, has been bragging about this four hundred-dollar driver that he borrowed from a friend in Phoenix, and he's just killing it. He's crushing these drives so I'm like, by the 7th tee box, I get up

and say, “Hey,” It couldn’t hurt; I’m trying to break the ice. “Could I borrow your driver?” and he says, “Sure.” So I line up for the tee box shot, which happens to be in front of the clubhouse, fairway that way, kind of hit the shot; it goes off the toe of the club and goes straight left, the ball does, and hits my golf cart, (*laughter*) ricochets back—this is true—and lands in the tee box right between all of us. (*laughter*) And so I’m like, “Okay,” and there was nervous laughter, but not really, you know. It’s kind of a courteous, “What do we do with this guy?” and so I had the club and I kind of leaned it up like this and said, “Well, it wasn’t the club,” and as I leaned on it here, the head of the club goes, (*laughter*) and I broke the club in half...broke the club in half and the head falls in the tee box right between us! *(laughter)* You can’t make this up. This is true. Believe me, there was more than one occasion where I was intensely wishing that invitation never would have come. And for the next two miserable hours—I had to finish that round—I wished I would have never accepted that invitation, right? But, it was a moment that I still get revved about today from those guys for sure.

When I was last on this stage at the end of December, we were looking at 2014 all ahead of us, and we talked about what God might be inviting us into in this year 2014. We talked about a word or phrase or step we might be able to take. Can you believe, I mean it’s cliché but, how fast time goes! We’re half way done—six months done with this year already. It’s hard to believe, and if we don’t live with this kind of intentionality that God’s inviting us toward, man, time just flies by! But we talked about it at that weekend—the great story in Numbers 13, of God’s invitation to the nation of Israel, an incredible invitation to step into the Promised Land that He’d promised this nation for generations. This was their time. So, as you remember, they were freed from slavery; they came up to the Red Sea as the army of Egypt was in hot pursuit of them, God freed them from that. They came up through the desert and came right up to the literal Promised Land that God had promised the nation of Israel, and here they are—this is their time! Moses, if you were here, you remember sent twelve spies over to the Promised Land to check it out. Ten of the twelve spies came back and said, “Yeah, it’s a great place but we can’t do it. There’s no way. The cities are huge; the armies are vast, and they’re physically superior to us. There’s no way we can take the land.” And they buckled to fear and influenced an entire country to turn their back on God—and the nation of Israel missed their moment. And what was the result? God said, “Okay, if you’re going to doubt Me at this moment, doubt the promises, you’re going to wander in the desert for forty years.” We’re not talking about four or five people wandering out there. We’re talking hundreds of thousands of people are turned back into the desert. “And you’re going to wander for forty years until the whole generation that doubted Me is dead. And when that happens, we’re going to give you another shot, essentially, but you’re going to wander in the desert for forty years until the entire generation that doubted Me at this moment’s gone.”

And so—fast forward—fast forward forty years later. Only Caleb and Joshua, now the leader of Israel, remain. Everyone else is gone including Moses, who has died, and the nation of Israel and this next generation has come up to the Promised Land and this is their moment—this is their time—this next generation to say, “Are we going to doubt and wander or are we going to claim truth and claim God’s promises and step into the Promised Land that which He’s promised us? Are we going to doubt and wander or are we going to make the sacrifice and step into the land?” This is their moment. They’ve heard the stories, right? They had to have heard the stories about what it was like over there—of great fertile, beautiful land—but it was inhabited by large cities, massive armies and men that were physically superior warriors to what they were. They had to hear it—the sacrifice and the obstacles were still the same, but this time the story ends differently and that’s what we want to focus on this morning.

This time, this generation is ready, ready to take the step to wherever God would lead them. So we're going to pick this story up with this beautiful, amazing, relational conversation that God is having with Joshua in Joshua 1, verses 1 through 9. So if you want to turn with me to that, if you've got a Bible, that would be great. Let me just read this for us.

> **...after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory. No man will *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."** (*NASB, Joshua 1:1-9)

Man, what a powerful passage, huh? There are a few observations that I wanted to make, and take a few minutes here. First, the one that just absolutely pops off the page and, when you think not only of this passage of Scripture, but the context of the whole story that I've been able to talk with you about the last couple times is: this is a God of second chances, right? This is a God of multiple chances. He brings them back after all they doubted. After all they saw, He brings them back and gives them another shot. This is a God of second chances! Now I don't know about you, but I for one in this room am very thankful for that—that there is a God that has a heart that says, "Okay, you were knocked down. Learn from it, but it's about what you're doing from here. Let's go." I mean, we saw that in the invitation that Jesus made to Peter, right, in the (video) clip we just saw. The power of that invitation to say, "It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter what you're doing. Let's go. We can change the world here, Peter."

The beautiful part of that clip, in that story, I think is the finish. See, no one followed Jesus closer than Peter did, right? Over the next three years of Jesus' life, no one followed Him closer. He was the first one invited in. He was *the rock*—the man who was going to build some things forward after Jesus' life. And no one followed Him closer. And by definition, in that day, a disciple followed his rabbi so close that he could taste the dust off his feet. That was the image they had in the day. The disciples followed their rabbi around, followed him so closely that the dust would kick up off the heels of their feet. So Peter was close to Jesus for three years; no one was closer, yet what happened in the last days, in the last hours of Jesus' life? Peter failed. He fell and he denied Christ three times. He said, "I'm not with Him; I don't know Him." Through all that he'd seen and all that he believed, he knew this was a man but also the Son of God and he knew it; he'd seen it. But yet he failed and struggled. But the beautiful part is the interaction that Jesus has with Peter later, after His death and resurrection. Very paraphrased here, but the sense is Jesus comes to Peter and says, "Peter, you fell; you failed. It's okay. Get up; brush the dust off your back; get back in this game. I need you. In fact

I'm going to build the whole thing around you. What you did doesn't matter; now learn from it and let's move. Let's go. This mission is too critical. What we're doing is too important." What a beautiful story of second chances and multiple chances. And that same offering is out there for you and me. That's the power, or some of the power of this story—that God is a God of second chances.

Okay, what else? That God's words hold true through all the circumstances, through all that went their way. Even though the people of Israel drift, even though they wandered for forty years, even though they doubted and struggled, God's promises held. His words were true. His love didn't fail. That's huge, right? And even though the same is true for us, even though we may wander, even though we may doubt and struggle and lose ourselves in the wilderness, sometimes for significant parts of our life, God's promises hold and His love doesn't fail. It reminds me of Romans 8, right?

> **Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written,**
> **"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;**
> **WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."**
> **But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (*NASB, Romans 8: 35-39)

God's love didn't fail the nation of Israel, even through generations of slavery. His love didn't fail them when they came up to the Red Sea and were being pursued by the Egyptian army. His love didn't fail when the second generation of the nation of Israel comes to the Promised Land, crosses the Jordan River and comes up to the mighty city of Jericho, fortified by walls of stone and seemingly, from the outside, impossible to penetrate. And yet God brings the walls down and gives the city to the nation of Israel. His love didn't fail. No obstacle was too high, no risk too great, no success to blinding, no failure or struggle too overwhelming. God's love didn't fail.

Now, believe me, I stand on this stage in a very vulnerable position as we talk about this stuff. I know how hard that is. Believe me, I do. You saw a little bit of our story played out last week in our family, but through the last years we've had some hard times, just like many of you have really struggled with this concept of, does God hold His promises? Does His love really not fail? And what I've seen—I do some writing and, you know blogging and stuff, and as I was kind of looking back over what I wrote—the times where the most passion came were during the hardest times, during the biggest struggles. God's love doesn't fail. It's shown me again and again there are times of very significant breakthrough, and some of the most desperate times we faced over the last eight or nine years—and in those moments, and I think you kind of know this too—in the most difficult moments, that's sometimes when we can feel His presence the most and sense Him with us more than ever. It's true. And I think we gotta hang on to that and believe it—that His promises hold, that His words are true no matter what circumstances we face. His love doesn't fail.

Last observation of this passage and it's an important one, I think. You think about this passage and there's this conversation God is having with Joshua, but Joshua, through it, we don't hear from him in these nine verses, right? I mean, he's quiet. Now, think about who Joshua was. He was a warrior; he was a man of action. He was Moses' right hand man forever. He enforced Moses' instructions to the people; he had Moses' back. Joshua was one of the twelve spies that went into the Promised Land the first time forty years earlier, and he saw the obstacles, the same things everybody else did.

He saw the vast army, saw the people, and saw all the things they were going to have to go through, realized the sacrifice they were going to have to make. But his outlook on that was, "Let's go. God gave it to us; He promised it. Let's go." He's a man of action; he's a warrior, yet we see in this part of the passage he is quiet, and he's listening. And then he acts! That's critical for us, I think. A critical observation and how important it is for us to quiet ourselves for a time, and to listen to what God's saying, and then act. He has a real posture through this passage. You just kind of can sense it as you read it, of Joshua just kind of listening and soaking it in, and immersing himself in God's words and waiting for that moment and those kind of marching orders that he's getting, but kind of immersing and quieting himself down and listening to the words of God for that moment.

So with that in mind, I'd like to read this passage again and this time ask you to just listen. Don't follow along in your Bible or on your phones or whatever. Just put that stuff down, and just listen kind of quietly as we can to God's words, not only to Joshua but God's words to you and me. This time I'm going to read it out of *The Message* translation. Just quiet yourself and soak in, immerse yourself a little bit in the words God has for each of us.

> [Joshua], **...Moses my servant is dead.** [So] **Get going. Cross this Jordan River, you and all the people. Cross to the country I'm giving to the People of Israel. I'm giving you every square inch of the land you set your foot on—just as I promised Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon east to the Great River, the Euphrates River—all the Hittite country—and then west to the Great Sea. It's all yours. All your life, no one will be able to hold out against you. In the same way I was with Moses, I'll be with you. I won't give up on you; I won't leave you. Strength! Courage! You are going to lead this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. Give it everything you have, heart and soul. Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don't get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you get to where you're going. And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you'll get where you're going; then you'll succeed. Haven't I commanded you? Strength! Courage! Don't be timid; don't get discouraged. GOD, your God, is with you every step you take."**(*The Message, Joshua 1:1-9)

This passage is a great invitation. We saw a great one in the video clip coming in but this passage is a great invitation to you and me to step into what can be a life-altering, life-changing kind of relationship with God. It's an invitation to gain courage, to take a breath, and face whatever God, and whatever the world's got for us in these next six months. And as we look at the rest—the last half of 2014—it's a great invitation to take courage, like I said, take a breath and say, "God, what do you have for me next?" This passage is a great invitation for each of us to step into the bigger story that He has for each of us. Whether you're eight or eighty-eight in this room, He's got something for the next season of our lives, without a doubt, and it's an invitation to step into the bigger story He has for us.

There's nothing—you know as I thought about how I should end this**,** with this incredible passage of Scripture, what could I possibly add to it to make it better? And I realized, I can't. I mean there are no words to add to the powerful words God's already given you and me. So I want to do something unusual for us, and so hang with me for a moment here. I would like to read this one last time, and this time as quiet as we can have it in here, I just ask you to really kind of block out what's around you and take a posture, kind of feel like Joshua was taking as he was just quietly listening in awe of the words God was giving him. And let's take that same kind of reverence into

hearing this passage one more time. And in the quiet moments that follow after I read it, there's a bookmark inside *The Loop* that you got, and what I would ask you to consider doing is: if a word or phrase pops out at you through this passage of God's words, not mine, write it down, capture it and grab it, because you know that may be His word for you today and going forward over the months ahead. So capture it there and if a step, an action, a context comes to your mind as well, write that down, and if not, don't worry about it. Come back to this later this week, but for now listen with me one more time to the great words God has for us in Joshua 1:1-9. And before I read that, let me just pray.

Lord, thanks. Thanks for the power of this story. Thanks for being a God of second chances. Thanks for being a God who's given me a second chance—multiple chances. I just pray You'll help us this morning, just take a couple of quiet moments to really listen quietly to You, and the word You have for us as we think about the weeks, the months, and the season ahead of our life. Amen.

[Joshua], "**...Moses my servant is dead.** [So] **Get going. Cross this Jordan River, you and all the people. Cross to the country I'm giving to the People of Israel. I'm giving you every square inch of the land you set your foot on—just as I promised Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon east to the Great River, the Euphrates River—all the Hittite country—and then west to the Great Sea. It's all yours. All your life, no one will be able to hold out against you. In the same way I was with Moses, I'll be with you. I won't give up on you; I won't leave you. Strength! Courage! You are going to lead this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. Give it everything you have, heart and soul. Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don't get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you get to where you're going. And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you'll get where you're going; then you'll succeed. Haven't I commanded you? Strength! Courage! Don't be timid; don't get discouraged. GOD, your God, is with you every step you take."**

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