

To Serve with Distinction

Joshua 1:1-9

By [Guy Richardson](#)

March 30, 2014

It is such a privilege and an honor to be invited here tonight to be a part of this time, a new chapter beginning in this church. And I just first want to thank the Pearl Singers. Thank you for coming and being a part of our worship. That was wonderful and it added so much. Thank you for being here. And guys, I'm jealous of the ties; I wish I could get one of those somewhere!

A Time of Transition

It's a time of change. And someone has made the quip saying that the only people who really like a lot of change are babies in diapers and I think that's probably true. And for some of you this is probably a difficult time. And yet it is God's leading and God's work and in that we rest and we look to Him. And I want to first thank you for your part as Ligon Duncan has become the chancellor now of Reformed Theological Seminary. There were very few that could take that position and many of you have concurred with that and we thank you for that. And we see already God's hand in his leadership, in his very personable way of doing things, his love for the Lord, his love for God's people, the global vision that he has. God is already doing some amazing things through him. We cannot thank you enough and we mean that. Thank you. And we look forward even now as you've confirmed that God is calling David Strain. It's interesting. A man, I was just here - how many months ago? Just a few months ago, standing at your installation as assistant and who would have ever thought that you would be now moving into the senior saddle. There's so much that goes with it.

And I told you if you were here back in - what was it, May? About May? How much I've grown to know and love and appreciate David and his family. I shared with you that we were introduced to him with our daughter, Joy, who at the time was, when he came to Columbus with his family, she was a student at "The W" studying nursing and there at the church and she started calling us on a regular basis, reading her notes from his sermons, saying, "Daddy, you need to go online and listen to this guy!" And I finally broke down and did it, and I will tell you, I don't go online and listen to a lot of sermons and I was impressed. And God was blessing us. And then he started coming and studying further at the seminary and we were privileged to have him in our home and we had many, many conversations in front of the fire in the fireplace with mugs of hot drinks talking

about all manner of things and it was such a privilege to be able to get to know him and his family. Denise and I heartily concur. But I also, back in May, read a list of job qualifications. Having the privilege, the opportunity to be in a lot of different places, I've started collecting as I've done some interim work in churches. It's about eight churches at this point that I've been helping as they look for pastors and I've been amused and have collected just a list of expectations, particularly in our PCA churches about what people are looking for in a senior pastor. And if you will indulge me, I think for calibrating our thinking about what you're thinking you're getting, it might be a little help to go back through these just a little bit. Forgive me if I'm going over ground again that you remember, but these are some of the qualifications, the non-negotiables that I've heard from different people. There are actually more but I'm going to weed it out here a little bit.

Pastoral Qualifications

First, he must be thoroughly knowledgeable and committed to the Bible and its authority, inerrancy, and inspiration. Great. He must be thoroughly reformed in his theology, familiar and committed to *The Westminster Confession, The Larger, Shorter Catechisms*. He should be traditional in his approach to ministry and formal in leading worship, yet he should be appealing to youth, young couples, and particularly to the un-churched or those unfamiliar with PCA stripe of Presbyterianism. He should be young, no more than forty or in his forties. I don't know whether that's for the energy level or just, "We don't want to do this again anytime soon." I'm not sure, but I kind of read that as a forty year old with fifty years of experience - always looking for somebody that's mature and energetic to deal with the complexities of the church. He must be intellectually challenging to the people from the pulpit but he must not bore them or speak over anyone's head. He must preach fearlessly and strongly against sin yet not preach in such a way that people are so offended that they leave. He should set regular office hours to be available for people to drop in. He should give pastoral visits at least twice a year in the homes of the church officers and perhaps more. He should be available for emergencies and crisis counseling whenever needed. Just a corollary to that, I've watched and listened - people are very, very sensitive that they know that their pastors need time to study and to be by themselves, to reflect and to be with their family, and everybody agrees with that until it comes to their personal crisis and then they want the man. And you multiply that by - how many people in this church? He should be involved in civic activities as good public relations for the church. I'd be helpful if he enjoyed hunting, tennis, golf, and especially college football. He must have a strong, exemplary marriage and a model home life. Really the only thing left is that he should be able to walk on water - don't you agree? The expectations.

Effective and Distinguished Leadership: Then and Now

You have, by God's leading confirmed David Strain to be your next senior pastor,

to work alongside a wonderful staff and the elders and deacons and leaders in this church, and so tonight this is not an installation sermon; this is more of a confirmation sermon. This is more of a clarification sermon, because in all reality we all have ideas of what we think we want in a pastor, certainly in the senior pastor, but more importantly we need to look and see, "What does God want for us?" And in that we turn to His Word. I could have chosen many passages. There are a lot of angels that we could have gone in this but I chose to go into the older testament to the book of Joshua to a really familiar passage to many of us here, one that I will use as a springboard to draw together some things to twist the lens and focus on God's provision for effective and distinguished leadership.

And to set the stage, this is the time at which there has been a transition. God has led His people through Moses and now Moses is at the end of his time of leadership and God has tapped Joshua. Moses dies and God commissions Joshua. We begin reading at verse 1 of Joshua chapter 1. Follow with me, if you will, in whatever translation that you have:

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 'Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I sword to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good 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 good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

Father, we open our Bibles but You alone can open our hearts. And we ask that even now You would do this for each one of us - that we would be strengthened in You, that we would learn that we grow in the grace, and we would go in Your Spirit to serve and honor You as You give us the privilege to do this. In Your name we pray, Lord Jesus, amen.

Now there's always dangers in drawing too many parallels or inferences from a

historic account of things going on and trying to apply that to a current situation, and yet I do think that God gives us so much of His Scripture in the historic accounts in order to be able to dissect them and see patterns and parallels and things that could be of help to us and I think that's why I chose this passage tonight. Now I'm going to break it into three parts. If you want to take notes or if you just want to document the heresies I want you to break it into three parts. The method is the first thing - the method of God's choice. The second thing would be the man of God's choice and the third thing would be the mission through God's choice. The method of God's choice, the man of God's choice, and the mission through God's choice.

I. The Method of God's Choice

The method. Can you just imagine what it would have been like to follow Moses as the leader of God's people? Who would it be? Apparently there was no one that had a parallel with Moses in the people's mind. There was no one with the fire; no one who had the authority to do what he had been doing. No one knew what it was and in fact Moses apparently does not know himself who would be God's choice. When Moses knew he was coming to the end of his years of service and leadership he is diligently praying himself that God would give him and would show them who the next leader would be. In Numbers chapter 27 verse 15 and following it says, "Moses spoke to the LORD saying, 'Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them and who shall lead them out and bring them in that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.'" Moses doesn't really know. But you do note a few things that Moses does not do. He does not poll the people for their input and suggestions. There is no popularity vote. There are no petitions circulated. There is no contest. There is no, what - "Israel's Got Talent" sort of thing to kind of bring up the best contenders to be the leaders. There's not a "good old boy" system to garner a following that would lobby for their leader.

Who would it be? It could have been Caleb. Caleb was the other spy with Joshua going in with the twelve - the only two men who came back saying, "Yes, there are giants. Yes, it looks insurmountable. Yes, there are obstacles that God is bigger. He's told us to go, let's go!" And he was outvoted. So much for a democratic following! It could have been Caleb. It could have been one of the godly priests. It could have been one of the judges. It could have been one of the sons of Moses. They were all capable people, but in time, we're not told how long, Moses was led by God to tap and to bring Joshua to the people. Numbers 27:18, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest in the congregation and you shall commission him in their sight.'" I find it interesting that God uses a man to bring the man of God's choice to the people. He didn't go to Joshua and say, "Okay, you're the man; now go tell them, 'Here I am.'" The

method of God's choice.

II. The Man of God's Choice

What about the man of God's choice? It really does not take a lot of study to realize that God's choice in Joshua was quite a different choice than Moses. Moses had been raised in Pharaoh's court, he had been a privileged child; in fact, he had been spoiled rotten. He had a hot temper. By the time he's age forty he thinks he's ready for the leadership of God's people and so he takes the initiative. In fact, he kills an Egyptian thinking somehow that it was justified to do that. He's not a man who goes to God to ask for directions; he does things first and in doing what he did he had to run and flee for his life. He had to hide in the desert. He had to live in obscurity and was there for many years, forty years. But God knew where he was and God went to him in His timing, after he had been trained in what I refer to as DTS, which is the Desert Theological Seminary, and He brought him back at age eighty after Moses is convinced that his life's work is over. He's settling into retirement in obscurity and God brings him to faceoff the Pharaoh and lead God's people out of bondage into the next chapter of their lives where they'll be faced with new challenges and new opportunities and God would have to discipline them with new direction in the desert. But that time also ends and now it's Joshua. And Joshua's a man quite different. He was very content to be under Moses. He was happy to be under his authority. He was jealous of the honor of Moses. When Moses' authority had been threatened or challenged it was Joshua who went after them. He was glad for the recognition and the honor to go to Moses. And from all that we can see, never did Joshua, who in his self-evaluation saw himself as a two-talent man, ever think that he would follow a five-talent man.

When Thomas Jefferson was sent by America to France, fledgling America, he went to the French Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs to pay his respects and the minister said, "You replaced Monsieur Franklin!" to which Jefferson said, "Sir, I succeed him; no one can replace him." Wise words. Joshua was not another Moses. Joshua was not supposed to be another Moses. And yet he was God's choice. Let's put it a different way. Joshua could not be Moses the Second. He had to be Joshua the First. And had he tried to be Moses the Second I think he would have failed. He had to be who God had equipped him to be and called him to be. So when it comes time for Joshua to assume this position, how do you think Joshua must have felt? Do you think he was exuberant? Do you think he was excited and energized for the occasion? Confident?

Glorious Promises and an All-Sufficient God

Look again at this chapter we just looked at. Verse 6, God says to him, "Be strong and courageous." Verse 7, "Be strong and very courageous." Verse 9, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened. Do not be dismayed." Are you

detecting a pattern? You see, the repeated admonition by God to this man is giving us insight into his inner working, his thought processes. These are the words that He's giving to this man who, when He says, "Be strong," He's talking to someone who feels weak and inadequate. "Be courageous" - twice! That's an admonition to somebody who's afraid, who's terrified. "Do not be dismayed." That's the admonition to someone who is overwhelmed with the tsunami of what he realizes may be coming at him. Could I suggest that it must have been easy for Joshua to be strong and to be courageous as long as Moses was the point man? Now Joshua is in that place and now Joshua will have to learn, in real time, day to day, day by day, the same God who led Moses is the God who promises to lead him - "I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you." And even in that reality Joshua trembles.

I think that we would all agree that it's usually in this state of great insecurity in utter dependency that God calls us to do what He calls us to do. Years ago I wrote down comments, some words by F. B. Meyer. He said, "Most men are too strong for God's tasks. They're too full of their own schemes, their own plans, their own ways of doing things. God must humble us, bring us down, to realize the inadequacies in ourselves and the absolute necessity of dependence on Him." Joshua's feeling it. It's the same words that the apostle Paul would write a thousand years later in 2 Corinthians 12. "Christ said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, and persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.'" One of the most interesting paradoxes of the Christian life is when we are weak in ourselves that's when Christ is most evident in His strength and provision.

III. The Mission through God's Choice

The method of God's choice, the man of God's choice - what about the mission? It didn't take long for Moses, it didn't take long for Joshua to realize that they had a daily dependence on God. Moses had something that Joshua wouldn't have. It says in Exodus 33:11 that Moses spoke face to face with God as a man speaks with his friend. He's going to be writing a lot of Scripture and God will be directly communicating with Moses but He's not going to do that in the same way with Joshua. But equally important, Joshua is going to be given God's guidance and he will have God's presence and primarily that was to be done through knowing the revealed Word of God even as He had given it to him through Moses. Joshua 1:7 - "Be careful to do all according to the Law of Moses my servant and what he commanded you. Do not turn from it, to the right or to the left, that you may have good success." By the way, it just strikes me - you do realize this is a commandment and God gives us a commandment only to protect us or to provide for us? Verse 8 - "The Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth

but you shall meditate on it that you may be careful to do all that is written in it, for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success.” This is a call for Joshua. It’s a call for all of us. This is not the charge for some brand of heavy-duty Christianity or super-Christians. We all need that and we’re all given it.

IV. Application

The method of God’s choice, the man of His choice, the mission in His choice - what do we learn from this? Let me just share a few thoughts. And I think this relates some to where you find yourself here at this point. Having been an interim now, and I think it’s my eighth church - I’ve been here at Reformed Seminary for fifteen years. One of the things that has struck me is that the truth is, is that all pastors are interims. Whether they’re there for three months or thirty years, there’s a time slot. There’s a time of transition from one chapter to the next.

Godly Leaders: Unique, and yet the Same

And many of you have been around for a number of years and you’ve watched how God has brought this church amazing, godly, long-tenured leadership. Some remember as far back as Dr. John Reed Miller or Don Patterson or certainly Jim Baird and Ligon Duncan and now begins a new chapter with David Strain as the senior minister. But while there’s a uniqueness to every one of them, everyone’s a different package of gifts and abilities, not the same as the ones before, but there still is a sameness that you can discern if you look into every one of their lives, even as we could look into every one of the godly leaders throughout the accounts in Scripture that God has given us. Some of them are well-known, some aren’t, but there’s still a sameness and that sameness ends up with the Lord Jesus saying to every one of them as He would say to us, not, “Well done, thou good and famous servant.” “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Parallels here. It’s just interesting looking at Joshua’s life. Just as it had happened to Moses in Joshua’s time, it’s Joshua’s time now to lead the people. In chapter 24 at the end it says that Joshua is a hundred and ten years old when he dies. I couldn’t help but laugh when I read that. It reminded me of a man who’s getting quite elderly and he poked his wife after he was reading something and it said that even as you get older you need to put a little spice in your life. And he said, “Sweetie, I need to put a little spice in my life.” And she said, “Honey, you don’t need spices; you need preservatives!” Well even preservatives will only last for so long and in the preparation for the next chapter of God’s people, Joshua, like Moses, is concerned for the people and he’s praying for the people, even as I know Ligon Duncan has spent a lot of time praying with you. And we see the most interesting thing that happens. Now we could look at the end of the book of Joshua with snapshots preserved for us. We see interesting things - that’s sort of a bookend in things. Chapter 23 Joshua, when he realizes

he's coming to the end of his tenure, he gathers together all of the elders and those that are leading the people of God and he has an officer's retreat with them and we are given some snapshots as to what they talked about there. But in Joshua chapter 23:6 it says, "Be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left." Does that sound familiar? It was the same charge that God had given him years before. There was a sameness in his concern. There was a likeness in what he wanted to make sure was being done. His first priority was faithfulness to God's Word and the first place to make sure that that would be done would be with the elders and the leaders, to follow the Lord and to be united to Him, and then committed and involved with the people to lead, not lag behind.

Constant Dependence on God's Provision and the Marathon of the Christian Life

I read a story of a man who had volunteered and had joined the army and he went into his first battle and it didn't take long before it terrified him. And he panicked and he started a one-man retreat and he just ran as hard and as far as he could run. And after a while of running he was stopped by an officer with a pistol accusing him of desertion, saying he would execute him, that he would court-martial him. And the private said, "Captain, I am so sorry. I will go back. If you will give me another chance I will go back. I will fight. I will do it. Captain, please let me off!" And after a minute the officer said, "Well, okay, but pay attention. Notice this. I'm not a captain. I'm a colonel." And the private said, "Oh I'm so sorry, sir. I didn't realize I was that far behind the lines." True leaders cannot be effective from behind the battle lines.

After that retreat, after the officers are on board together, they all come together with the people in another retreat and check in them in chapter 24. And Joshua tells them their story again, the old, old story of what God had done. He talks to them about God leading, taking Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and leading God's people through Moses, recounting these amazing things that God had done - His presence and His power to protect them and provide for them. If you go through chapter 4 you see over and over "God took...God gave...God sent...God brought...God destroyed...God delivered" and never is there one word to give the glory or the credit to any one of the great and the godly leaders that God had given them in the past. The credit was to God. And Joshua tells them, "Remember your story. Don't forget what God has done and don't forget that there's yet more work to be done." I think in that principle we also must recognize that through God's leading of this pulpit committee, of committed, careful, fellow believers, God has led you to the next senior pastor for First Presbyterian Church, but this is not the time to pull out the checkered flag and have the victory lap and call the race over. This is a marathon. This is the passing of the baton from one runner to the next. The race continues and even as Joshua knew in chapter 1 that his walk before the Lord was not going to be

easy, it was not a picnic. He was telling the people, "Look at what God has done, but you can't live in what God has done in the past. You have to live in who God is in the present."

That's where we all live too. I hope you've come to the point in your walk with Christ to understand that the Christian life is not a picnic; it is war! There is a real spiritual warfare and the reason we're here is not because the Christian life makes it easy or sweet but because we believe it's the truth and by God's grace and leading and working in our hearts we follow Him. Each generation has to live this. That wonderful section of Joshua 24 - "Now" - it's in the present! Don't reenact what God has done in the past; you can't. You can't relive it. "Now," verse 14 of chapter 24, "fear the Lord and serve him" - present tense - "in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods your fathers served." And then he finishes in that wonderful verse in chapter 24, verse 15, it's carved in my parent's home on the mantle over the fireplace where it was for the forty-three years that they lived in that house, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." It's a choice; it's a commitment. It's daily; it's over and over. Just like marriage - you stand before the preacher and you say, "I do," the next day you need to say "I do" all over again in your heart. It's not something that's static. It's not something that happens once. It goes over and over, day by day. It's a walk, it's a walk, it's a choice. And we fall and we get back and we go back.

Christ Jesus: The Great Shepherd of the Sheep and King of His Church

A friend and I were talking about that wonderful passage in Romans 12:1-2. "Present yourselves as living sacrifices, perfect and acceptable before a holy God." My friend looked at me and said, "You know, I think I figured out what the problem is with living sacrifices." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Yeah, the problem with the living sacrifice." He said, "I think the problem with the living sacrifice is that it keeps trying to crawl off the altar." You see, the same God that was at work nearly three thousand years ago with Joshua and two thousand years ago with the apostle Paul and the early Christians, that's the same God that's at work now. And the sweet center in this, to see this - the people may be different, the places are different, they drove different cars than we drive today. Let's put it that way. The principles are the same and the God that led His people then is still the God that leads us to know Him, to grow in Him, and to go in Him. The sweet thing in all of this, the most important takeaway that I want you to go with is that the real leader of God's people was never Joshua, it really had not been Moses or Abraham. None of them as far as I can see in Scripture had a sign on their desk saying, "The buck stops here." The real leader of God's people was always God Himself." By His Spirit, through His Word, and could I suggest - you know this already. I think it was Samuel Johnson who compiled the first English dictionary, he said, "People need reminding far more than they need instructing" - I think that's true.

Do I need to remind you that the real leader here at First Presbyterian Church

has not changed nor has he just been elected? The real leader of this church, even in this wonderful call and confirmation for David Strain to shepherd and preach, to train us in a combat knowledge of the Word of God because it is a war, the real leader of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ. "I will build my church," He said, "and the gates of hell will not prevail." We think we've got headwinds and we do, but "He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world." And we as His people in this time, in this place, this narrow slot of time in all eternity have the privilege to know Him and by His grace to come in relationship with Him and to grow in that and to watch Him work to lead His people and to do amazing and wonderful things, even, even through sinful people like you and me. And in this we love Him and we follow Him and we have the promise to prosper because of who He is. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, thank You. Forgive us of our pettiness and shallowness to not realize that You are Lord. Draw us to Yourself, Lord, in unity and a sense of new direction and anticipation that yes, the battles will rage and yes, there will be new things to do and many difficult things to face, but that just as You had promised to be thousands of years ago with Joshua and Moses and all those who walked with You by faith You will also be with us and so we give ourselves again to You with joy and thanksgiving for who You are, what You have done, what You will do, this and for eternity. We commit ourselves to You, Lord Jesus, again. Amen.

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