

#2013—July 25, 2010—“Highlights from Pastors Conference”—1

[Gauger:] They serve us and teach us, and when necessary they offer correction. They're pastors, and they need encouragement just like you and I do. Well, on today's *Moody Presents*, a look at the world of pastors from the Pastors Conference at Moody Bible Institute. Hi, I'm Jon Gauger, welcoming you to *Moody Presents*, the half-hour broadcast with Dr. Paul Nyquist, himself a former pastor. Well, today we're going to hear a message from Joshua 1, the very message that was delivered to more than a thousand pastors gathered from across the nation on the Moody campus. As they do every May, pastors gather together to refocus. Now from Joshua 1, a message from Dr. Paul Nyquist.

[Nyquist:] The life of a pastor can be rich and rewarding. It can also be draining, especially when you get to this point in the ministry year. I don't know how everyone is in your church, but I know in our church we spend all summer planning and preparing for the year ahead. We hit the fall with the pedal to the metal. You go right into Christmas with all the extra requirements that that puts upon you, and then in January you have to restart all your ministries again. That leads you right into Easter, with all the extra requirements that Easter puts upon you. Then you pick your way through April, and finally you end up here in May, and you're worn out, and the weekly cycle has taken its toll on you, and you know it.

You're leading a Bible study, and you can't find Obadiah. You preach the same sermon to your congregation two weeks in a row, and nobody notices. You see in the newspaper a name in the obituary of someone you were supposed to visit in the hospital last week. You sit down for a meal with your kids, they look at you funny, and they look up at your wife and say, "Who's the stranger?"

There comes a time when you just need to stop and refresh and refuel. That's what refocus is all about. I'm so glad you're here. Our desire is just to try and minister to you as best as we can so that you can then minister to your flock as best as you can. So I'm glad you're here.

Let's dive into the Word tonight. I'd like to have you turn with me to the Old Testament to the book of Joshua, chapter 1. This past April 10 a Russian airliner got lost in the fog and crashed right near the western edge of Russia. Ninety-six people died in that airplane crash. That's enough tragedy in itself, but it was even more tragic for the country of Poland, because among those who died in that airplane crash was not only the president, Lech Kaczynski, but also his wife, Maria, and many of the top military and political leaders of that country. Here is a list of those who died in that plane crash: the national bank president (so finances), the deputy foreign minister, the head of the national security office, the deputy parliament speaker (so a lawmaker), the army chief of staff, the navy chief of staff, the head of the air force, two presidential aides, three lawmakers, the head of the Polish Olympic committee, and an army chaplain. In one brief, fleeting moment they lost most of the top influential leaders of that country. When the dust cleared and the mourning stopped, the realities hit, and that is that facing them were all these empty shoes. Big shoes. Shoes that had to be filled if that country was going to move forward again. Yet the question was, who is going to step into those shoes? Who is going to wear those big shoes? Can anybody step into those shoes?

As Christian leaders, you know those same kinds of holes can develop, and empty shoes can develop, in Christian ministry—not necessarily because of a plane crash, but also for one of two reasons. First, because human life is finite. We don't live forever. Our bodies are not designed for this. If you hit seventy-five or eighty years, you've nailed the national average. So first, empty

ministry shoes can develop because of just human limitation. But secondly, empty ministry shoes can emerge because God moves His people around in the harvest.

That's what He did, for instance, with Philip in Acts 8. Philip was having this tremendous ministry in the city of Samaria, and God's Spirit told him to go outside to a deserted road. There he ran into and connected with the Ethiopian eunuch. He led him to Christ, and then that eunuch ended up taking the gospel to the land of Ethiopia. He did the same thing with Peter in Acts 12. Peter was the lead dog in Jerusalem, but after he was miraculously delivered from prison, it says in verse 17 that he went to another place. He went to another place because God moved him on.

So empty ministry shoes are inevitable. That's true of your church; that's true of my church. It's true of your ministry; it's true of my ministry. Empty ministry shoes are inevitable. If you haven't faced them yet, you will. Sometimes they can be big shoes. Bob Lanier wore the largest shoes ever in the NBA. They were size 22 shoes. I mean, those are shoes!—the size of Rhode Island. But you might be looking at a pair, staring at a pair, of those empty ministry shoes right now, and God's people might have placed them in front of you, and they're asking you to step into them. That is, you're challenged to take on this new, different, maybe much larger ministry than you've ever had before.

If that's true, then I know what you're thinking, because that's what I was thinking when I had a pair of ministry shoes put in front of me twelve months ago: the presidency of Moody. Now, I've walked around in ministry shoes before. I mean, I've been the pastor of a couple of churches, and I've been the president of an international mission agency, so I've walked around in ministry shoes before. But I've never seen shoes like this, because this is the school that was founded by the legend D. L. Moody. This is the school that has been in operation for 124 years, touching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ: four thousand students, two undergraduate campuses, two graduate school campuses, a large publishing ministry, a large radio ministry. If you're staring at an empty pair of ministry shoes right now, I know exactly what you're thinking. You're thinking what I was thinking. That is, this job is too big. My feet are too small. The job is too large. The responsibilities are too great. God, You do not understand. I've got little feet, and little feet belong in little shoes. Not just anybody can step into those kinds of shoes, can they?

For the answer to that question, I want to take you back 3400 years to someone else who has gone through the experience of looking at some empty shoes. His name was Joshua. We're going to look here at Joshua 1. We're going to look at this entire chapter together tonight: Joshua 1. Joshua was nervously fingering the edge of that animal skin tent that was parked just outside the main encampment. He had been here before, so it was familiar territory, but he had always come with someone else, namely Moses. Joshua had been by Moses' side for forty years, like Tonto to the Lone Ranger, like Friday to Robinson Crusoe. Whenever Moses needed him, he was there. But now Moses wasn't there.

Thirty days ago Moses had climbed his last mountain. Following Yahweh God's bidding, he gave one last word of instruction to the twelve tribes of Israel, and then that great leader of a man took that trek up Mount Nebo, which was just east of the Israelite encampment. There, even though his eye had not dimmed nor his strength waned, the One who first made man from the dust buried him, and Moses knew why. In a prideful moment of disobedience he had turned a rock into a fire hose by not speaking to it but by striking it. The just Judge had rendered his verdict, and that is that Moses would lead the nation up to the edge of the Promised Land, but he would not step into it. So Moses was dead.

For the last thirty days the nation of Israel had interrupted their normal routine in order to mourn the death of this one who had been their one and only leader. Some had taken off their normal tunics and put on garments of rough sackcloth. Others had taken off their sandals and were walking through the encampment wailing. Others were sitting in ashes, and they were throwing dust into the air. Everyone was visibly and verbally involved. Their leader, the great Moses, was dead. This was the one who had gotten the best of Pharaoh and then persuaded him to release his evil grip on the Hebrews. This was the one who had raised his hands over the Red Sea and caused it to part. This was the one who had received the Law from God on Mount Sinai. This was the one who spoke to God face to face. Until the coming of that spiritual Redeemer two thousand years later, there would never be another prophet in the land like Moses. He was their emancipator. He was their lawgiver. He was their prophet. He was the founder of their nation. He was George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Billy Graham all rolled into one, and now he was dead.

That's why Joshua was so nervously fingering the edge of that tent, because he had never come here alone. This was the tent in which Moses met with God, appropriately called the Tent of Meeting.

Joshua knew he was the one to be the next leader of the nation. A couple of years before, Moses had brought him before the nation, and there in the presence of Eleazar the high priest he declared that this was the leader elect of the nation, and at that moment Joshua felt confident. He felt ready. He felt prepared. But now at the time when he actually had to step into those sizable sandals that Moses left behind, he was gripped with fear and doubts. Could he really lead the nation in the conquest of the Promised Land? He understood military strategy through all his time in Pharaoh's army, but he didn't know how a bunch of ragtag slaves would perform in combat. Furthermore, would the people even follow him? That was the more fundamental issue. You're not a leader unless somebody is following you. And they had threatened mutiny on someone of the stature of Moses, so would they even follow him?

After pondering these questions Joshua turns into the tent, and there, just like God had done with Moses, God speaks to him. He says this in verse 1:

Now it came about 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."

God speaks, but He doesn't begin with cordialities. He doesn't begin by giving condolences. He begins by giving Joshua a command. He says, "Arise, cross the river, and possess the land." Ah, the land. Since the time that Joshua had been a teenager in Egypt, he had heard about that land. He had heard how it had been promised to Abraham, and then how that promise had gone to Isaac, and then how it had been passed down to Jacob, who had brought his family into Egypt. For centuries the Israelites had clung tenaciously to that promise of the Promised Land, much like a scared toddler might do to his mother in a crowded shopping mall.

Thirty-eight years ago Joshua had had a chance to get a peak at this land when he had scouted it out, spied it out for forty days with eleven others. Even though there had been a passage of

time, he still remembered how good a land that was: rich valleys, lush farmland. Oh, it was good land. But back then he was just Moses' assistant. He wasn't in charge. So it's perhaps a little bit easier for him to declare boldly to the people, "We need to cross this river and possess the land that God is going to give to us." He wasn't in charge back then, and now he was. And he's trying to determine where he needed to go. God speaks, and He says to them, "Arise, cross this Jordan River, and take the land."

That was something that not even Moses was able to get the nation to do. But now God was telling Joshua, "I want you to do this. I want you to cross the river and possess the land. I've been promising it to them for centuries, and now we're going to do it, and you are going to do it. Go do this." I'm sure at that moment Joshua was feeling a lot like I was feeling twelve months ago. It may be how you're feeling if you're looking at a large pair of empty ministry shoes. You're thinking, "God, You don't understand. I've got little feet, and little feet belong in little shoes." Right?

In the next set of verses, God tells us that we aren't supposed to look at the size of our feet. He says in verse 5,

"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."

God gives this reassurance to Joshua. He says, "Filling big shoes doesn't take big feet; it just takes a big God." And He gives two promises here to Joshua. First He promises, "I am going to be with you, just like I was with Moses." The words were probably ringing in Joshua's ears when He said, "Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you." As Moses' assistant for forty years, Joshua had seen how God indeed had been with Moses. He had seen how God had empowered Moses before Pharaoh. He had seen how God enabled Moses to perform miracle after miracle. He saw how God buttressed Moses when it looked like his leadership was beginning to crumble. He had seen how God had been with Moses for forty years. Even though Moses had failed God, God had never failed Moses. And now He was giving that precious promise to Joshua. He says, "Just as I have been with Moses, so also I will be with you."

[Gauger:] From Refocus 2010, Moody Bible Institute Pastors Conference, that's Dr. Paul Nyquist with part one of a message from Joshua 1. We'll be back next week with the conclusion to that message, but right now we wanted to bring you a highlight moment that is enjoyed at every single Pastors Conference. In addition to the great teaching, imagine the singing of more than a thousand pastors—more than a thousand voices getting to sing hymns like "Holy, Holy, Holy."

[Music: "Holy, Holy, Holy"]

[Gauger:] From Moody Bible Institute Pastors Conference 2010, that's more than a thousand pastors singing "Holy, Holy, Holy." Again, next week we'll be back with part two of Dr. Nyquist's message from Joshua 1. Meanwhile, let me point you to our website, moodypresents.org. There we've got podcasts that we're making available of the *Moody Presents* program. If you're not familiar with podcasting, it's a terrific way to keep up with the broadcast. The message that you just heard today is automatically downloaded to your computer so you can listen at your own convenience on your own device. We also have online audio; that's free as well so you can listen again. And if you'd like to take the messages with you in a different form, maybe an MP3 or a CD, we've got those available for sale as well at moodypresents.org. And while you're there, check out the Hall of Presidents message collection. A year ago we introduced this series of all past Moody Bible Institute presidents, a historic collection. You'll love it. Check it out online at moodypresents.org. Printed transcripts as well, and lots more at moodypresents.org. Now for our producer Chris Segard, I'm Jon Gauger, saying thanks so much for listening, and join us again next week here on *Moody Presents*.