

Hanging out With Heros

JOSHUA

You can't be awesome
without faith



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Peterson

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JOSHUA: YOU CAN'T BE AWESOME WITHOUT FAITH

Introduction

Having trouble living above your circumstances? Then get better acquainted with Joshua, because his life was full of obstacles. He began as a slave in Egypt. Then he became Moses' assistant, enduring the complaints and grumblings from unthankful, rebellious Hebrews as they wandered in the barren desert. When Moses died, Joshua led the people in battle against the strong armies and well-fortified cities of Canaan. But Joshua lived a life of

victory and obedience. And once you've learned Joshua's secret of an overcoming life, you, too, can live in victory.

What If Life Is One Big Obstacle Course?

Moses was one of the greatest leaders in history. What a hard act for Joshua to follow! But he had great faith. When God told him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you" (Joshua 1: 5), Joshua believed Him. When things got tough, he never complained about not being Moses, because Joshua was willing to let God work through him. And his job required incredible courage. He was to destroy an entire nation so the Israelites could take the land.

Many people have wondered why a loving God would order the Canaanites to be destroyed. Archaeology helps to explain this problem. Excavations have shown that these people were more immoral than any other nation of the ancient world. If they had been allowed to continue their sexual permissiveness their physical and spiritual disease would have infected the entire world. So, however disagreeable the task might be, Joshua was required to destroy the Canaanites in order to protect God's world and to give His people the land promised to Abraham.

Joshua's first obstacle was the Jordan River – at flood stage. (It's not a very deep river in the dry season.) How was he to get all those people across the rushing waters? After all, none had learned to swim while trekking through the desert. So Joshua got his instructions from God: The priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, were to walk right into the water. Unusual instructions, yes, but when the priests' feet touched the water, the river's flow was cut off until everyone had crossed over. No one even got his feet wet.

To insure the people wouldn't forget this miracle, Joshua had twelve stones (one for each tribe) piled in the middle of the Jordan River. Then he had twelve stones taken from the middle of the Jordan and erected as a monument on the Canaan side. When future generations would ask about the stones, they would be told the story of the miracle. The story would live on.

But right on the heels of this miracle followed another huge obstacle: the mighty fortress of Jericho. If they did not conquer Jericho, the Israelites would never take Canaan. But when Joshua went down to look over the situation, Jesus (1) appeared to him – and gave him history’s strangest battle instructions. So, in faithful obedience Joshua organized a silent military parade to march around Jericho. After seven days and thirteen laps around the city, the priests blew their horns, everyone shouted, and Jericho’s walls fell down.

(1) He is referred to as the Captain of the Lord’s army – most Bible scholars conclude that this was an Old Testament appearance of Jesus.

Now only a little town named Ai prevented Israel from taking the center of the country and cutting Canaan in half. Israelite spies reported only a few people at Ai – only two or three thousand soldiers could easily finish off the town. But soon after they attacked, these Israelites were running in terror. Thirty-six of their men were killed by the soldiers of tiny Ai. Why?

The humiliating defeat at Ai would always remind Israel of the cost of disobedience. God had commanded that all the wealth of Jericho be put in a special treasury to support the priests and the worship services. But a soldier named Achan stole some gold and silver and a stylish Babylonian garment and buried the loot under his tent. God had warned that a person stealing any of these things would die and bring disaster on all Israel. So Achan was put to death by stoning. Then with fresh instructions from God, the soldiers conquered Ai and destroyed it. The people of Israel then took time out for spiritual renewal and listened to Joshua read the Law of Moses.

But What If You Get Tricked into Sin?

Soon representatives of the Gibeonites, next in line to be destroyed, paid a visit to the Israelite camp. Wearing old clothes and worn shoes, and carrying moldy bread and tattered wineskins, these men claimed to be from a far country and requested a peace treaty with the Israelites. Regrettably, Joshua and the leaders didn’t bother to pray about the request and signed a treaty. When they realized they had been tricked, the Israelites were “stuck”. They were obligated to keep their word. So, when five southern kings attacked Gibeon for siding with the enemy, Joshua went out with his army to rescue

Gibeon. Joshua's men slaughtered the enemy – while God gave extra hours of sunshine, preventing the enemies of Israel from escaping in the darkness and returning to fight another day.

After defeating the five main southern kings, Joshua routed a coalition of thirty-one northern kings. (One of the cities he burned, Hazor, has been excavated by modern archaeologists who have found ashes left from the time of Joshua.)

With the big enemies defeated, all that remained were a few pockets of resistance, so the Israelite leaders divided the land among the different tribes. The tribes were to trust God to help them drive out every last Canaanite. Some completed that assignment. Others did not. Because they failed to annihilate the Canaanites, the Israelites had to contend with guerrilla warfare and enemy occupations for years to come.

Joshua, however, kept his faith strong and kept encouraging the Israelites to obey God in everything, thus to receive God's blessing. In his famous farewell address, Joshua challenged the Israelites, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24: 15). These words were not just a dramatic speech; they were the testimony of Joshua's life.

Under the Circumstances, Over a Barrel, or in Jesus?

"After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide; 'No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful'"
(Joshua 1: 1, 5-8).

Do you feel imprisoned by your circumstances – by tension at home, temperamental friends, hard subjects in school, or a cat who refuses to be housebroken? Joshua could have felt imprisoned, too. He had a high-pressure job trying to fill the shoes of Moses, one of the very greatest leaders in history. He had to lead a nation of stubborn complainers. He was caught between the scorching desert behind him and the fierce, fortified cities before him. There seemed to be no way out –without God. So the Lord gave Joshua a great promise (the above verses). Joshua believed that promise, acted on it, and God worked miracles.

God has promises for you, too, but Satan doesn't want you to know about them. Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you" (John 15: 7). The devil wants such promises for a victorious Christian life kept secret. He wants you running around feeling discouraged and helpless because of your circumstances, rather than having faith in God's promises and receiving deliverance.

How do you find God's "This Way Out" sign in each tough situation? Theodore Epp says it this way: "Faith lays hold of a promise and is therefore the basis for courage." 2) In other words, you first must find a Bible verse that applies to your situation. (If you don't know the Bible very well, ask someone to help you find an appropriate verse.) And remember, this is God's promise. God never fails. He always fulfills His promises.

(2) Theodore H. Epp, *Joshua: Victorious by Faith*. Lincoln, Nebr.: Back to the Bible, 1968, p. 43.

Next, make that promise part of you. As God told Joshua, "Meditate on it day and night" (Joshua 1: 8). As you continually think about that special promise you've found in Scripture, the Holy Spirit will make that promise real to you. You then can act on it, and in faith take the path labeled "This Way Out."

Here's an example of how this principle works. If someone has spoken harsh words to you in anger or thoughtlessness, there's now a "tape recorder" in your brain playing those words over and over. Now you need a remedy from

the Bible: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5: 7). This promise says you can get rid of that terrible feeling caused by the “tape recording” in your head. So meditate on the promise, asking the Holy Spirit to teach you exactly what it means. For example, in the verse we chose, “cast” really means throw. Therefore, God is really saying, “Throw every worry on me and I'll take care of it.” If we’re playing catch and you throw the ball to me, you don’t have it any longer. God wants you to deal with your problems and worries in the same way, by throwing them to Him. And you don’t have to do it problem by problem: you can roll them all up in one ball for Jesus to worry about – and He never worries. Besides all this, the verse is a command. It doesn’t say, “*Try* to give your problem to Jesus.” It simply tells you to do it. So decide to throw the whole problem to God, and each time the devil reminds you of the harsh words, tell him, “That’s God's problem, not mine.”

Like Joshua, learn to believe and claim God's promises, to meditate on and make them part of you, and to act on them. If Joshua had not done this, the rest of the book of Joshua, with all its miracles, would never have been written. If you're really in Jesus and His word is in you, you won't be living under the circumstances and nothing will put you over a barrel.

“Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” (1 Kings 8: 56).

“ ... He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1: 4).

“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9: 23).

1. What are the characteristics of God's promises?
2. What can we receive through His promises? (See 2 Peter 1: 4).
3. How do we cash in on God's promises?
4. Find one of God's promises, meditate on it, believe it, and act on

it.

Crossing River Impossible

“Then Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.’ Joshua said to the priests, ‘Take up the Ark of the Covenant and cross over ahead of the people.’ ‘As soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord – the Lord of all the earth – set foot in the Jordan, the water flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.’ So, when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them. ... Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. ... So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan” (Joshua 3: 5, 13-17).

Ann Kiemel Anderson, a popular Christian author, loves impossibilities. (She even wrote a book called, *I Love the Word Impossible*.” But most of us don’t. We feel overwhelmed: “I won’t ever pass the algebra final”; “I can’t possibly forget the way he hurt me”; “Trying to witness at my school is hopeless”; and the list goes on. There seems to be no way to conquer these circumstances. But there is *one* way: Jesus.

God told the Israelites to cross the Jordan River at flood stage without as much as a rowboat – a seemingly impossible order! In addition, they were told to do things that most people could consider crazy. First, the Israelites were to keep their eyes on the Ark of the Covenant and follow it. (The Ark of the Covenant was a gold-covered box containing the original copy of the Ten Commandments and other objects that symbolized God’s power, presence, and promises.) Second, the priests carrying the Ark were to walk into the overflowing Jordan River – and the waters from upstream would stop flowing so the people could walk across on dry ground. Talk about conquering the impossible!

The God of Joshua can do the same today for you. This story teaches two

principles, and if you obey them you also can win victories over the impossible. The first principle is to keep your eyes on Jesus. The Ark of the Covenant represents Jesus who is “God with us.” If you look to Jesus, your “ark,” rather than to your Jordan River of impossibility and to your daydreams about the Promised Land, you can walk boldly across the rushing waters of hopelessness. Even Peter, the disciple, walked on water as long as he kept his eyes solely on Jesus – and you can too!

The second principle, one people often fail to recognize, is to go ahead and act on God's promise before there is any evidence that God will come through. This is real faith that grabs God's promise to Jeremiah: “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is *anything* too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32: 27). Do you believe God can even help you understand algebra? He can. So, meditate on God's power, His ability to give knowledge. Then act on it. Instead of saying, “I'll flunk the final for sure,” say in faith, “With God's help I'll pass it.” Then you can study (faith is never a cop-out from work) in faith instead of frustration and take that test in peace instead of panic. And you'll find out nothing is too hard for God.

But what about that person who hurt you? How can you possibly love him? By faith. In the same way you learned to understand algebra. God commands you to love: “... love each other as I have loved you” (John 15: 12), not “Love unless the person has hurt you.” So, in faith obey this command. Defy your emotions and put your feet into the Jordan by deliberately doing something to show love for that person. Pray for him every day. Don't avoid him. Be friendly. Then ask God what you can do for that person that would help him. Take conscious steps of faith to forget that hurt.

You can witness by faith as well. Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1: 8). This is a promise. Therefore, go out on a limb and say in a faltering voice, “There's something that changed my life and I want to tell you about it.” God won't let you fall. He'll come to your rescue, but first you'll have to get your feet wet. Then God will open the Jordan.

Next time something seems impossible, remember how the Israelites crossed the Jordan at flood stage. In good weather your River Impossible can seem bad enough, but when thunderstorms of problems soak you, and the river

starts to overflow, panic comes easily. But don't give in. Instead, do as the Israelites and keep your eyes on the Ark – Jesus' presence. But always remember you must also act in faith on God's promise to you.

“During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’ ‘Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’ ‘Come,’ he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’” Matthew 14: 25-31).

1. What circumstances, as the waves on the Sea of Galilee, would scare you if you focused your attention on them?
2. Find a Bible promise for each one of those problems and claim those promises.
3. Now, in the best way you know how, give the problems to Jesus and take His hand just like Peter did.

Living by Dying

“So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, ‘Go over before the Ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’” tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever. So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua: and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.

Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan ...”
(Joshua 4: 4-9).

The Israelites placed stones in the Jordan River, so they and their descendants would never forget what God did for them the day they crossed on dry ground. They memorialized the event, not because God had performed a miracle, although that was wonderful, but because crossing the Jordan put them into an entirely new kind of life; victory. Wandering in the wilderness symbolized the life of a defeated, me-first Christian. As a person who has accepted Jesus as Savior if you haven't died to self-centered attitudes; this creates most of your misery and prevents you from knowing victory.

God asked the Israelites to cross the Jordan, to leave behind their life that had catered to selfish desires, and to enter a new life of obedience again. This didn't mean God hadn't been with them. He had – the Ark of the Covenant they had been following symbolized His presence. In the same way, if you have received Jesus Christ, but continue to live selfishly, you can still have Jesus in your heart. But Jesus died not only to forgive sins, but to destroy sin. The selfish part of you that likes to sin, the source of sin in your life, was crucified with Jesus when He died. However, you can consider the selfish part of you dead only by faith, just as the Jordan had to be crossed by faith. But stubbornness and unbelief caused the Israelites to wait forty years, even though they could have entered the Promised Land immediately. So, don't be stubborn. Your sinful self was crucified with Christ. Believe it and act on it, and you, too, will enter the land of victory.

This, however, is not a one-time experience that you never need to think about again. You must constantly keep in mind the death of your me-first life. Realizing this was true for his people, Joshua commissioned a visible reminder of the Israelites' death to the self-life of the wilderness and their entry into the faith-life of the Promised Land. So he ordered two piles of stones built as memorials – one in midstream as a memorial to the death of the old life, and one on the bank of the new land as a reminder of their new life.

Waterskiing helps illustrate the truth of death to the self-life. If you try using your snow skis on the lake, you'll say skiing on water is impossible. To

waterski, you have to completely scrap the notion of using your snow skis. Winter is gone. In the same way, the victorious Christian life is impossible if you continue to pamper your sinful desires. They'll drag you under, just as snow skis on water. Instead, you must die to self, and then let the resurrection of victory take over in you.

You can't, of course, ski on water under your own power. In order to waterski, you must grasp the rope and let the boat pull you. In faith you must obey the instructions of an expert, even if they seem silly or if you'd rather do it another way. Yet, after you get up, you can get scared or become distracted by the scenery and drop the rope. If you do that, you'll fall.

But falling doesn't alter the fact that there is a way for you to waterski. And it doesn't mean that you can't ski again after falling. You can, of course, get a psychological hang-up and tell yourself, "I'll never waterski again because I fell." But your feelings don't make that the truth. Later, if you continue waterskiing, your falls will be caused by pride and trying things you aren't yet ready for. But none of your failures will change the fact that there's a wonderful world of waterskiing that you can experience.

And the life of victory is the same way. Crucified with Jesus, you no longer must live a sinful, defeated life. Theodore Epp says of this; "God does not make it impossible for men to sin, but He always makes it possible for them not to sin." (3) Believing that and deciding to live it is like crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land of victory.

But you will always need the stones of remembrance to remind you that you can live in faith and victory. Satan will lie, saying, "This case is different. You just can't help yourself." He will try using fear to make you fall. He'll try to distract you or make you proud. But always remember that dying to self and living to Christ is completely possible. And if you fall and sin, confess it, get back on your skis and by faith claim victory.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 196.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and

gave himself for me” (Galatians 2: 20).

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Corinthians 4: 10).

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2: 24).

“Since you have died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules” (Colossians 2: 20).

1. Why must you die to your self-life in order to live a victorious Christian life?
2. How can the life of Jesus live in you?
3. Why is it possible to act on your death and resurrection with Jesus, then return to a life of defeat? Even if defeat is possible, is it necessary?
4. Have you died to your selfish self or do you still want your own way?

Brick Walls, Boring Days and Breakthroughs

“So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. On the seventh day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, ‘Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!’ When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city” (Joshua 6: 14-16, 20).

It’s easier to fight one enemy than a bunch. You need to learn that many of the battles you face in your Christian life are unnecessary. Your enemies are self, the world and the devil. By eliminating the first two, you have only one enemy left.

Lets say you want to start a Bible study for your friends at school. If you've decided to follow Jesus no matter what other people think, the taunting from some classmates won't matter. You won't really have to fight the world, because it's not a threat.

There is, however, a more subtle enemy – self – that gets offended when people don't listen to what you say, that wants to watch basketball on TV rather than prepare the Bible study, and that gets discouraged by the criticism some students offer free of charge. This old sinful self was crucified with Jesus and you can enjoy that fact by realizing, *My old self is dead. Its desires are dead. I rose with Jesus and now I want only what Jesus wants.* (See Romans 6: 11).

If you really don't care what other people think of you, if you've died to the selfishness in you that always wants its own way, the only enemy left is the devil. He will always be there with his Jerichos to block your way, but God has given you authority over Satan. The Bible says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4: 7). You can win the victory by applying this verse to your life. You can have victory over the devil.

The battle of Jericho shows how a victory can be won if there's only one enemy to fight against. By marching around the city wall, day after day, with spectators jeering from the towers, the Israelites proved they no longer cared what other people thought of them. If every citizen of Jericho thought they had lost their sanity, it was okay with the Israelites. They were dead to public opinion. Under orders to march around in silence every day, they obeyed even though they were not told why they were doing such a seemingly senseless thing. As Theodore Epp explains, faith can't question God since He rarely interprets His commands in advance. (4) Nobody could complain about the unorthodox battle plan and offer his superior ideas. Nobody could gripe that marching was getting boring and that it didn't do any good anyway. Nobody could even jog to get some decent exercise. Each person had to be dead to his selfish desires and obedient to God.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 183.

The walls of Jericho fell down by faith. It's always the same. Only in faith

can you defeat the devil. Walking around that great fortress with its tall, thick walls made every person realize defeating Jericho was humanly impossible. The battle had to be the Lord's. No one tried to use human tactics. That's why the walls of Jericho fell.

You'll never run out of Jerichos to conquer. The devil will see to that. But you can see all the walls crumble – if you'll obey God even when everybody else thinks you're dumb, even when His instructions cut across the grain of your personal desires, and even when you must admit total helplessness. (Actually, if you think you have things completely under control and can do it all by yourself, God can't really help you.) Don't get discouraged by your present Jericho. So what if you've hit a brick wall? Unpack your faith and obey God's instructions. Watching walls fall down is really fun!

“Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 John 2: 15).

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6: 6, 7).

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (1 Peter 5: 8, 9).

“And do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4: 27).

1. How can you get rid of the obstacles caused by worldly opinions? Should ridicule ever stop you?
2. What has God done about the selfishness inside you? What is your part in making this real in your life?
3. How are you to deal with the devil?
4. Have you been nice to the devil lately? Don't waste any time before you kick him out.

Losing the Game but Winning the Championship

“When they returned to Joshua, they said, ‘Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there.’ So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them. ... Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord. ... The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned. ...’ Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.’ Achan replied, ‘It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel.’ Then the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land’” (Joshua 7: 3-6, 10, 11, 19, 20; 8: 1).

Does the following problem sound familiar? You rededicated your life to Jesus at camp or at some meeting, and during the next week you had a great time witnessing to some friends at school. Then disaster struck. Your mother yelled at you for not cleaning your room, for forgetting to buy milk on the way home from school, and for not remembering your aunt’s birthday. Then you lost your cool, and with a B.C. display of temper lashed back at your mother with a torrent of vicious vocabulary. After it was over, you felt completely defeated and wondered how you could have experienced such great victory and defeat in one week.

The same thing happened to the Israelites. After watching the walls of the strongest city in the country fall down flat, they were defeated by the defenders of the little hick town of Ai. Why? First of all, they were self-confident. They acted as though they had destroyed Jericho when God had done it all by a miracle. Therefore, they decided Ai was so weak that only two or three thousand soldiers could easily take the town. They forgot that God doesn’t use the same strategy for each problem. He did not plan the same kind of defeat for Ai as He used for Jericho. And the Israelites never bothered to ask God about His method for capturing Ai.

There is a tremendous difference between self-confidence and Christ-confidence. There is never a reason to feel self-confidence after a victory in the Christian life because you didn’t win the battle. God did. Such pride

always leads to defeat (Proverbs 16: 18). Yesterday's faith or yesterday's strategy won't work for today's battle. You must keep in constant contact with Jesus.

The other reason for Israel's defeat was Achan's sin; He had kept some of the loot from Jericho that was to be set aside for God's work. This sin had to be confessed and punished before Israel could have another victory. Any sin that is not confessed and squarely dealt with will cause defeat.

What if you, like the Israelites, blow it completely? You can recover lost ground, even as Israel finally defeated Ai and again lived in victory. But that return to victory was not easy; Israel had more difficulty conquering Ai than Jericho. As Alan Redpath remarks: "Recovery of lost ground in the Christian experience is the most difficult problem of all." (5) But God can do anything, and He can show you what to do after you have failed. Confess your pride and independence, your disobedience and lack of prayer. Then ask God what to do next. Sometimes apologizing to your mother can straighten out the problem immediately, but more often you'll have to regain the confidence of the person you've sinned against by living consistently before him for weeks – even months. Although God forgives immediately, a minute of disobedience may require hours, days, or months of obedience before the wrong is wiped clean from the mind of the person you offended.

(5) Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living, Studies in the Book of Joshua*. Old Tappan, N. J.; Fleming H. Revell, 1955, p. 123.

Don't let pride, prayerlessness or sin create an Ai for you. But if you do suffer a defeat, remember there is a road back to victory. That road may require drastic action, and it will mean sticking closer to God than ever before, but victory will come, no matter how bloody the defeat. So don't let the devil tell you differently. You may have lost a game but Christ in you can still win the championship.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9).

"Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong" (Isaiah 1: 16).

“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isaiah 55: 7).

“Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil” (Proverbs 16: 6).

1. Using the above four verses, write down four steps for getting back on the road of victory after a defeat.
2. Verbal (spoken) confession of sin is the first step. Why is that not enough?
3. Jesus died for your sins and only He, not your good deeds, can forgive you. In what sense, then, do love and faithfulness atone (make up for) for your wrong?
4. If you have just experienced a defeat, prayerfully ask God for the specific steps you must take to get on the road to victory.

The First Masquerade Party

“We are your servants,” they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, “Who are you and where do you come from?” They answered; “Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard report of him; all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan – Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashon, who reigned in Ashtaroth. And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, ‘Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, “We are your servants; make a treaty with us. This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey.”’” The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by

oath” (Joshua 9: 8-15).

The devil is very sneaky. He tries to catch you off guard and deceive you. But you’ve no need to worry. If you’ve given your life to Jesus and are living by faith, you’ll win the war even though you may lose some battles.

If you really want to do God's will, Satan won't attempt obvious tricks, such as making you say the Bible is not true or telling you to steal money. Instead, he will present you with a decision that seems unimportant and will try to convince you to use your own judgment. He’ll try to make you think praying isn’t important and to pressure you into a quick decision.

The devil used these very tactics against Joshua and the leaders of the Israelites. The Gibeonites, as other nations in Canaan, were practicing gross immorality and satanic worship. Because of their sin God had commanded that all Canaanites be destroyed. The Israelites were not to make any agreements with these people. In desperation, the Gibeonites planned a masquerade party for the Israelites; they dressed as hoboos and then claimed they had traveled from a far land. Unfortunately, Joshua and the leaders were gullible. It was a good sob story and they may have been quite flattered that people would walk that far just to make peace with them. So, they didn’t take time to pray about the matter. In making a snap judgment they didn’t consider that nations don’t bother making a peace treaty with people whom they have no intention of fighting, or that bread gets moldy long before shoes wear out. They instead made an emotional response based on pride. Within three days they discovered their dreadful mistake; the Gibeonites were their neighbors.

Learn from Joshua’s mistake and avoid spur of the moment decisions. “Sure, I’d be glad to,” or, “No problem, I’ll take care of it” is sometimes better unsaid. Beware of giving in to pressure for an immediate decision. The expensive watch that is drastically reduced (and which the clerk assures you will be gone in fifteen minutes if you don’t buy it now) will still be there later if God wants you to have it. It is perfectly safe, sensible, and *necessary* to go home and pray about it before making the decision. Pray and think before accepting or making a date. Pray about what courses to sign up for, what books to read, what to do with your summer and whether or not to take tennis

lessons. Lack of prayer will impair your judgment. If you just “let everything fall into place,” you will do the falling!

But the story doesn't end here. Even though they had been tricked into the treaty, the Israelites kept their promise. They honored their treaty with the Gibeonites even though it meant fighting five kings who had attacked the Gibeonites. It was one of the greatest battles in history; God arranged the longest day on record so Joshua and the Israelites could finish destroying their enemies. After that the Gibeonites worked as servants for the Israelites, supplying the things necessary for the sacrifices used in worship. These tricksters remained loyal citizens and had a chance to learn about the God of Israel.

There's a beautiful truth here; Even if you've been tricked into a wrong decision, you can do the right things from now on. God can bring good out of evil and turn a curse into a blessing.

The world's first masquerade party has much to teach you, for the devil will try his trick-with-no-treat tactics on you, just as he did to the Israelites. So before you swallow what may be a bitter pill, ask God what you're going to catch. If you really believe that God is smarter than you are, you'll ask His opinion on everything.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones”
(Proverbs 3: 5-8).

1. List the commands given in this passage.
2. What does God promise to those who consult Him about everything?
3. What mistakes have you made in the past because you didn't ask God what you should do? How can you avoid these mistakes in the future?

4. Make a list of your priorities – be honest. Now ask God about each item on your list and change it if He tells you to.

Life with an Anti-boredom Guarantee

“When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the Lord said to him, ‘ ... there are still very large areas of land to be taken over. ... all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians and Caleb said ... ‘Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, with the Lord helping me, I will drive them out, just as he said’ ... The people of Joseph said to Joshua, ‘Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are a numerous people and the Lord has blessed us abundantly.’ ‘If you are so numerous,’ Joshua answered, ‘and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites.’ The people of Joseph replied, ‘The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the plain have iron chariots, both those in Beth Shan and its settlements and those in the Valley of Jezreel’” (Joshua 13: 1, 6; 14: 6, 10-12; 17: 14-16).

When you try to live above the circumstances, it’s the little things that get you down. If you’ve committed your life to Jesus, you’re not going to wreck your mind and body with drugs. You’re not going to move in with your boyfriend or girlfriend or flunk out of school to get even with your parents. Because Jesus has won victory for you, you want to follow His plan for your life, expecting Him to handle the “big things” in your life and give you victory.

But do you have faith to trust God if, through no fault of your own, you arrive late to the choir concert – in which you sing a solo? If your friend

accidentally spills a bottle of permanent ink on your new suit? If you lose your paycheck or have a car accident?

And what about those sensitive issues in your life? Do you have the faith to trust God if someone nags, “Aren’t you ever going to get any taller? You’re still a little shrimp.” If a person says, “Your sister is so outgoing and vivacious. Why are you so shy?” Little things can break us.

The Israelites found themselves in a situation where the little things would determine their entire future. They had conquered all the major kings. The only remaining fighting would consist of mopping-up operations. The leaders had assigned each tribe a portion of land, and each tribe was to drive out the enemies in its territory. God had given his promise of victory. Now the people needed only to act on these promises in faith.

But notice in the above verses the vast difference between the attitude of Caleb and the attitude of the people of Joseph. Caleb’s clan conquered all the land assigned to them because they acted in faith. Others, however, cowered in fear and missed the blessing.

As the Israelites, you have tremendous promises from God. For instance: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us *all things*?” (Romans 8: 32). What a promise! “All things” includes peace and poise when everything goes wrong. “All things” includes power to overcome personality defects and to handle the ridicule. God’s power *can* touch every area of your life.

The reasons for not cashing in on God’s promises never change. One reason is laziness. Instead of studying every verse in the Bible that speaks about peace, and then aligning your life with God’s truth, you just let the problem slide, figuring your tendency to panic easily is something everyone else will have to tolerate. So you never get rid of the problem. Some Israelites also preferred taking it easy. Rather than fighting any more battles, they let the Canaanites stay in their territory.

Another reason for missing out on God’s blessings is lack of faith, as demonstrated by the descendants of Joseph. They doubted an all-powerful God could do anything about iron chariots. (You probably do the same.

Instead of putting your faith in the Creator of the universe, you prefer to keep your complex.) Other Israelite tribes didn't annihilate the pagans as God had commanded because they wanted the pagans' tax money. Maybe you also sometimes prefer to compensate for your weaknesses instead of letting God get rid of them.

But Caleb was different. According to God, Caleb's secret of success was; "Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly" (Numbers 14: 24). In the same manner, if you follow God with all your heart, your life will not be full of loose ends. Your victory isn't complete because you've been easygoing and slipshod instead of following God wholeheartedly. But you can change and live a life as exciting as Caleb's.

Just as He said to Joshua, God is saying to you, "There remains yet, very much land to be possessed." Do you realize you could live to be 100 and still not exhaust God's power to change you and to change your circumstances? God always has more good things in store. His plans for your life come with an anti-boredom guarantee.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7: 7-11).

1. List the areas of your life that still need to be conquered.
2. Is power to conquer the problems on your list one of the good gifts God would like to give you? Yield yourself to Him and let Him give you that power.