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Series: *Joshua: A Call to Faith*

Title: *Your Walls Can Come Down*

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Scripture: Joshua 6:1-27

A couple weeks ago, Sue took Sylvia to see *Little Women*, and as much as I enjoy a good chick-flick, I decided to see the WWI movie, *1917*. I'm so glad I did. It's a powerful story about sacrifice and friendship and the horrors of war, loosely based on true events.

For those of you who haven't seen the film, I'm not revealing any more than the trailers, when I say the plot revolves around two British soldiers who are given a very important mission. They must get to another segment of the army miles away and warn them not to proceed with a planned attack. You see, learning that the Germans have retreated, the officer in charge of that part of the army has made plans to push forward with his troops. He believes the enemy is on the run and vulnerable, so he plans on a major offensive. But his strategy is flawed because--it's a trap.

The Germans have retreated intentionally to draw the British out and destroy them. So, these two soldiers must leave the relative safety of their trenches, cross No-Man's Land, get through former German encampments and through a German-held town and then head down river to the woods where other troops are preparing for what they don't know is a certain slaughter. If these two don't deliver their message by dawn of the next day, 1,600 British soldiers will die. As the movie poster says, "*Time is the enemy.*"

It's a great movie and I mention it because it shows the importance of GOOD STRATEGY in battle. When it comes to winning, a battle plan that is well-thought-out and based on accurate information, is everything.

That brings us to the next part in our study of Joshua as he reveals the strategy given him by his Commander for taking the walled city of Jericho. Let's start with the setting. The land God chose for the Hebrews was and still is a very hilly, even mountainous country in places. I remember on my first visit to the Holy Land back in 1994. I was quite concerned several times as our tour bus flew along roads that were built on the edge of a sheer mountain cliff---roads with no guard rail and almost no shoulder. The roads have improved since then but on that first trip I prayed a lot as we toured the heights of the Holy Land and I looked out my bus window down into nearly bottomless ravines.

Well, during Joshua's time the major passage through what would become Israel was a connecting road that ran from south to north through the most mountainous portions of the land. The plan was for Joshua to lead the Hebrews to drive westward from the Jordan Valley toward that high road, thus splitting the country in two. Then, with the enemy forces thus divided, he would lead his army first destroy the opposition to the south and then the opposition to the north.

This was a very good plan. In fact, British field marshal Edmund H. Allenby decided to use those same tactics when he successfully liberated Israel during World War I. But, as I said, before this strategy could be initiated, before Canaan could be divided into two conquerable halves---a wedge had to be driven from the Jordan River valley westward up to the mountains. And the first obstacle they faced in this part of the invasion plan was Jericho. Jericho was an impenetrable military fortress perfectly placed to prevent this kind of invasion strategy from working. Joshua couldn't just bypass it, because to do so would mean leaving a large military force at his rear. On the other hand, conquering Jericho was easier said than done because its walls were strong and high. In fact, as Pam pointed out, Jericho had not one but TWO walls. The outer wall was six feet thick and the inner

one was twelve feet thick. These double walls, combined with the position of the city, made it virtually impregnable. How then could any general hope to conquer this fortress?

Well, there were several options available to Joshua.

- He could have built ramps that would enable his army to scale the walls.

This is what the Romans under General Silva did in order to get his soldiers up to the fortress on Masada and over its walls in order to attack Jewish zealots after the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD.

- Another option was to do nothing. Just surround the city, lay siege to it, and starve them into giving up. But the Biblical record shows that Joshua did not adopt either of these strategies. In fact, he didn't even strive to come up with a strategy of his own. You see, Joshua wasn't really in charge. God was the one TRUE God Who made the rocks out of which Jericho was built, as well as the mountain on which it stood. Joshua simply followed the orders of THE only infallible General---one with not five stars on his shoulders, but rather the One WHO made the stars---stars that stand at attention every night as He calls them by name.

Take your Bibles and turn to Joshua 6 and let's read God's strategy. It's recorded in verses 2-5:

2 -Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

3 – March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days.

4 – Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.

5 – When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."

Now, if you were a soldier in the Hebrew army attending Joshua's briefing and heard this plan of battle for the first time, what would you think? Wouldn't you question your leader's sanity? I mean, high, thick, fortified walls do not fall to the noise of tramping feet. Cities are not won by trumpets. Yet the Biblical record tells us this is exactly what the people did.

They did not question Joshua's orders because they knew that they were actually God's commands. And, one thing they had finally learned in their 40-year-long desert boot camp, was to obey God. So, each day for six days they all walked in silence around the watching city and on the seventh day they repeated this apparently futile exercise seven times.

No one spoke, not even a whisper. Then, on their seventh lap on the seventh day the horns blew as they marched and when the city was entirely surrounded by the Jewish people, Joshua commanded saying, **"Now! Shout! For the Lord has given you the city."** And the people did shout like we did earlier---but MUCH louder. Verse 20 says, When the trumpets sounded a long blast, **"the people shouted, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in and took the city."**

However, I would remind you, that one portion of the wall did not collapse---that portion containing Rahab's home with that scarlet chord dangling from its window. Remember Pam's sermon from a few weeks ago? And not all the residents of Jericho were destroyed; as Pam said, Rahab and her family were spared. Look at verses 22-25:

"Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, 'Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her.' So, the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel. Then they burned the

whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD'S house. But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho..."

Now, many people have questioned the accuracy of this battle as recorded in Joshua. They do that because they have had a hard time believing that marching and shouting and trumpet blowing could bring down massive double walls. But an article in U.S. News and World Report way back in October of 1991 told of scientists who now confirm the Biblical record. Here's a direct quote from the article:

"The city's wall do appear to have collapsed suddenly and the blackened timbers and stones, as well as a layer of soot dating to 1400 B.C., all suggest that the city burned, as the Bible says it did. Archeologist Kathleen Kenyon also found bushels of grain on the site, consistent with the Bible's account of a springtime conquest so rapid that Jericho's besieged populace had not exhausted their food." Time magazine had a similar article which they entitled, "Score One For The Bible." (March 5, 1990)

Now the reason I've taken all this time focusing on this battle is because there is a sense in which we all face our own "Jericho's," seemingly insurmountable problems that often block our path as we attempt to do God's will. And with that in mind, there are two important principles we need to remember when it comes to dealing with our own similar struggles.

A. First, we must remember WHO we are and WHOSE we are.

Last week we read about how Joshua told the people to CONSECRATE themselves. This word literally means "separated to God" or "belonging to God." So, when we face something insurmountable---health scares, parenting issues, marital problems, a big bill you don't know how you are going to pay---we have to remember God is in charge. We are His children. We have to tell ourselves, "I am God's child. He is the Commander-in-chief of my life. This is His battle, not mine."

This principle is why the Hebrews were ordered to reinstitute the covenantal rite of circumcision and a new observance of the Passover. In other words, before the battle the entire nation reaffirmed the fact that they were God's chosen people. They pledged allegiance to His leadership. Then later in the chapter we read that when they came near to Jericho, Joshua met the captain of the host of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ Himself. Joshua asked Him, "Are You for us or for our enemies?" ***The Captain of the Host of the Lord replied, "Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come."***

And Joshua's response was to fall face-down on the ground in reverence and ask, "What message does my Lord have for His servant?" ***The Commander said, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."*** And Joshua did; affirming that not he, but rather GOD was in charge.

I hate to disagree with that old children's song, but Joshua didn't fight the battle of Jericho---God did. Well, we have to remember that when we face our own "battles." He is in charge. He fights for us. And it leads to the second principle:

B. No matter how overwhelming the "Jericho's of life" seem, we must remember that as Christians---as children of God---we fight FROM victory not FOR it.

Like God told Jericho, our battle is already won. Even Rahab understood this principle. Remember? She told the two spies in Joshua 2:8, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you."

Well, perhaps the reason the Hebrews followed Joshua's "odd" battle strategy so unquestionably was because they knew this as well. Perhaps as they marched they remembered God's promise of victory to Moses. In

Exodus 23:27 He had said, ***“I will send My terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run.”***

God had kept this promise. He had already gone before Joshua and his army. He does the same for us. The victory---God’s victory---has already been won. Do you remember Jesus’ words in John 16:33? He said, ***“In this world you will have trouble, [you’re going to face ‘Jericho’s’] but take heart! I have overcome the world.”***

God’s victory is already won. As Paul reminds us in Romans 8:31 ***“If God be for us---or if we be for God, who can be against us?”*** There is nothing in this world that can defeat us---not really.

Did you know that back then the Jews used two different kinds of trumpets? Some were made of silver and others were crafted out of Ram’s horns. The silver trumpets were used especially by the priests to signal the camp when something important was happening and the rams’ horns were used primarily for celebrations. Well the priests didn’t use the silver trumpets in this event. They used their ram horns because Israel was not declaring war. There was no war. They were celebrating victory, God’s victory. We must remember this as we encounter obstacles in life. We don’t fight for victory but from it because the battle is the Lord’s and He has already won. Let’s put it this way. We should live not like victims but as victors because that’s what we are! Okay with these principles in mind, let’s take a close at the strategy for this victory to see what we can learn.

There are two parts and we need to be familiar with them because they make all the difference as we face our own “Jericho’s” in life.

(1) The first was absolute SILENCE.

Remember Joshua’s briefing from God? The people were to keep absolutely quiet as they encircled this doomed city. Their lips were not to speak a word. Look at verse 10.

Joshua commanded the people, “Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!”

Now, this must have been a very difficult thing for the people to do. For one thing, there were several million people trying to do this at the same time, and it is hard to imagine any large group of people moving anywhere without at the very least a noisy hum. I have nine boys on my Upward team and as soon as I get four of them quiet the other five are talking among themselves. I can’t imagine how you would keep 2 million quiet. I mean, there were soldiers to get in line, children to keep track of, a route to be pointed out and taken.

Plus, I’m sure the Hebrew people would have had difficulty ignoring the taunts of the encircled citizens of Jericho as they looked down from their fortified walls. Now, I imagine that on the first day the Canaanites would probably have been quiet too, watching to see what the huge encircling army would do. And can you picture how bizarre that sight would have been? Think of it: a silent attacking force of millions watched by silent defenders, waiting for something to happen that never did. All that could be heard was the marching of two million pairs of feet. I bet you could have cut the tension with a knife!

But I’m sure the defenders’ silence would not have lasted beyond the first day. Eventually they would have begun to mock the Jewish soldiers saying things like: *“What do you think you’re doing, marching around our walls? What are you looking for, a way in? Do you think we’re so foolish as to have left a door open somewhere? Are you afraid to fight? Why don’t you climb up here? Come on, give it a shot. We’ll show you how a city should be defended!”* I bet their taunts increased and became more vulgar as every day passed. I’ll tell you this much, under such circumstances, it would have been difficult for me to keep silent!

And, then what do you think the Hebrews were thinking about during their silent march as they obeyed orders and ignored the jibes of the “Jerichoites?” I mean, they didn’t have anything else to do but think, so what went through their minds? Well, for one, I bet every step they made deepened their conviction that if there was to be a victory, it had to come from God. I mean, with every lap they saw up close how high and how impregnable those walls were and how impossible it would be to break down the massive reinforced gates of the city. They must have thought, *“God’s going to have to do this.”* And in my mind their next thought was, *“Well of course He will. After all, He’s promised us that He would!”* Perhaps at this point in their mental processes they remembered that in Exodus 14:14 Moses had said, ***“The Lord will fight for you; and you shall hold your peace.”***

Now this first step in Joshua’s battle strategy, this silence before God, is a lesson we all need to learn even today as we face seemingly undefeatable foes. Let me put it this way: one necessary and effective battle strategy for every Christian soldier is to close our mouths long enough to listen to the commands of our General. You see, sadly for too many Christians, our conversations with God---our prayer life is a “one-way” deal. We talk to God, but we don’t listen to God’s response. We aren’t silent before the Lord. In fact, be honest, how many of your prayers are quick one-sentence requests uttered while the radio is on as you drive or as you sit in the family room with the TV blaring? And because we “pray” like this we miss out on the main benefit of prayer: God’s specific guidance, tactical guidance---strategies that are essential when it comes to the struggles that come with life in a fallen world, real struggles that as Paul says, are not against flesh and blood but principalities and powers.

Well, over and over in the Scripture we see this particular battle strategy emphasized. In Psalm 46:10 God says, ***“Be still [hush up! listen!] and know that I am God.”*** Ecclesiastes 5:1 says, ***“To draw near [to God] and listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools.”*** Proverbs 18:15 ***“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.”*** And, do you remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:24-25, where He said, ***“Everyone who hears these words of Mine is like a wise man who built his house on a rock.”*** In Luke 8:18 as He shared the Parable of the Sower He said, ***“Consider carefully how you listen.”***

So, to deal with the “Jericho’s” of life we need to learn to listen to God. We need to train ourselves to be open and receptive to the promptings of His Spirit. And make no mistake, God does speak to us! As one author puts it, *“Throughout all of history, God has communicated, and He is still at it today. The issue isn’t whether or not God is speaking; it’s whether we will have ears to hear what He says.”* God speaks to us all the time but most of us fail to stop long enough and be still enough, to listen.

This week I came across an old proverb that says, *“All those who open their mouths, lose their eyes.”* I like this proverb because the purpose of silence before the Lord is to be able to not only hear but see what God wants us to do and where He wants us to go.

Erik Weihenmayer is blind, but in spite of that, on May 25, 2001 he reached the top of Mt. Everest. Suffering from a degenerative eye disease, Weihenmayer lost his sight when he was 13, but that didn’t stop him. On a mountain where 90% of climbers never make it to the top (and more than 300 have died trying) Erik succeeded, in large measure because he listened well. He listened to the little bell tied to the back of the climber in front of him so he would know what direction to go. He listened to the voice of teammates who would shout back to him, *“Death fall two feet to your right”* so he would know what direction not to go. He listened to the sound of his pick jabbing the ice, so he would know whether the ice was safe to cross. Well like Weihenmayer, when we take a perilous journey, listening well can make all the difference. In the struggles of life victorious disciples learn to say with Samuel, ***“Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening.”***

This leads to the second step in the strategy that Joshua employed in his attack on Jericho:

(2) Unquestioned and continued OBEDIENCE.

I put it this way because a careful reading of the text indicates that Joshua did not tell the people how many times they were going to have to circle the city or even exactly what was going to happen at the end of their seven days' marching. No, the people were given their instructions one day at a time. At the end of their assignment for that day, having encircled the walls, they were directed back to their camp, and nothing happened. They had obeyed Joshua, who had been obeying God. They had encircled the walls, but when they returned to camp, the walls were still standing, no one had surrendered---and the Jewish armies seemed to be no closer to the final conquest of Canaan than they had been the day before. This is how it was at the end of the second day and the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth. This is what things looked like after the sixth lap on day seven. Absolutely nothing appeared to have changed. Jericho's walls stood intact and its ramparts were still full of soldiers bristling with weapons.

This aspect of this battle reminds me of the experience of the Syrian general Naaman who had leprosy and went to Elisha the prophet for help. Remember? Elisha told him that God said Naaman would be healed if he bathed in the muddy Jordan river seven times. Naaman didn't like this idea. He preferred the clear mountain streams of his own nation. In 2 Kings 5:11-12 he said, ***"Are not the Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?"*** It must have been very difficult for this proud, pagan general to follow God's orders and wash in the Jordan seven times. He did so only because his servant told him it would be foolish not to try. But I think Naaman continued to question this cure. I bet he voiced his objections to his trusted servant every time he came up out of the water. After the first plunge he must have said, ***"Look, nothing has changed. I'm still as leprous as before!"*** And his servant must have said, ***"Keep trying master. Go under again."*** After his second dunk I bet they had a similar conversation. Naaman protested saying, ***"I'm just getting wetter and muddier."*** But the servant urged him, saying, ***"Remember, master the prophet said to dunk seven times!"*** And Naaman reluctantly obeyed over and over and over and over and over and over and over again. And it was only after the seventh dunk, after he obeyed, and continued to obey, that Naaman was healed. 2nd Kings 5:14 says, ***"His flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy."***

Well, it was only after the seventh lap on the seventh day and the shout that followed, that Jericho's walls collapsed. The victory was won only after the people obeyed and continued to obey God. We need to learn to practice this same strategy in our own struggles because there is no substitute for continued obedience to God. I mean, even when we can't see success---even when the world is doing the exact opposite thing---we must obey and obey and obey and obey. Remember, the kind of faith that pleases God is an obedient faith, obedience in spite of the results. Hebrews 11 compliments the faith of people like Abraham who obeyed like this. Remember, when Abraham was, ***"called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance obeyed and went even though he did know where he was going..."*** It reminds us that the other heroes of the faith, ***"were still living [and obeying] by faith when they died [even though] they did not receive the things promised."***

In his commentary on Joshua Dr. Alan Redpath suggests that ***"many people don't see the answers to their prayers simply because they have stopped one round short in their conquest of their personal Jericho."*** We may have been doing the right things but we simply stop doing them.

Now think about that for a moment.

How many marriages do you think ended because a husband or a wife gave up too soon? They obeyed God, but not long enough. How many lost people have not become Christians because their believer friends stopped praying for them---stopped looking for ways to have faith conversations too soon? How many

Christians have not become all that God wanted them to be simply because they stopped trying? How many of us have failed to defeat our own “Jericho’s” because we gave up. We tried, we made a couple “laps” around its walls, but we weren’t persistent enough in our obedience.

Well, people, that old saying is true, quitters never win. To deal with the Jericho’s of life requires consistent and persistent obedience. In his book *The Jesus Revolution*, pastor and author Leith Anderson shares a story about the results of obeying God—persisting in that. A number of years ago, he and three others were traveling to a Communist country where Christians were regularly being persecuted. They did not have a direct flight to their destination, so they had to stay in a neighboring country for one evening. That night, while having dinner with a few fellow Christians in that country, Anderson and his companions were approached about smuggling in some Bibles for the underground church. Anderson immediately refused to do so, pointing out that it was illegal. The Christians in that country would not take no for an answer, though. They told Anderson they would return in the morning with the Bibles and that Anderson’s group should “ask God what they should do.”

Anderson writes about the tough decisions that would follow: *“Overnight, I made a decision. A Bible or two might be risky, but not impossible. However, I wasn’t prepared for the following morning’s delivery. It was a small library of Bibles, books about Christianity, study tools, and videos. I truly can’t explain why we did what we did. We just felt God told us to—so we did. We divided up the Bibles, books, and videos among the four of us and loaded up every available space in our suitcases, carry-on bags, and purses. It was not a comfortable experience. When nearing our destination, the flight attendants distributed customs forms representing our names, passport numbers, and the answers to pointed questions. Were we bringing guns, narcotics, or LITERATURE into the country? The four of us sat paralyzed over what to write.*

*If we said we were not bringing literature, we were lying. If we checked that we were bringing books and Bibles, we were in serious trouble. It was one of those moments when the Holy Spirit gave a simple solution that we would not have thought about ourselves. We didn’t answer the question. We left it blank. I can’t say that we were confident in our choice, but that’s what we did. As we passed through immigration surrounded by armed guards and immigration officers, our forms were carefully scrutinized and all four of us were waved through. What I next remember is the secret night meeting when we turned over the Bibles and literature to Christians from the underground church. Their faces still remain with me all my life. You may want to criticize my lack of courage or condemn my actions as dishonest. For me, I was suddenly in the sandals of Peter and John who said, **‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’**” I know Anderson and his friends were thankful that they obeyed.*

I guess you could summarize Joshua’s battle strategy in two words: hear and obey. Hear God. Listen to His leading. And then obey Him and keep on doing so.

Okay, it’s evaluation time. Or, keeping with our military theme, it’s inspection time soldier! So, how are you doing when it comes to the battle strategy Joshua followed? Have you learned to be silent before the Lord? Do you listen to your General’s commands? And then, is your life one of not only obedience, but continued obedience? Let’s all stop for a moment and LISTEN to God...what is He telling you to do? Would you pray with me?