

Sermons on Joshua-Brian Bill

Be Strong and Courageous Joshua 1:1-9

Brian Bill June 17-18, 2017

Since our youngest daughter has now graduated from high school, it got me thinking about how many graduation speeches I've heard. Some have been very good and others, well, not so good. I've given some speeches myself...some were good, and others, well, not so much.

About a month ago Pastor Kevin DeYoung wrote a blog post for the Gospel Coalition called, "Beware the Graduation Speech." Here's part of what he said.

The truth is: you can't do anything you set your mind to. You can't be whatever you want to be. You aren't the last, best hope for planet earth. You shouldn't always follow your dreams. You shouldn't always believe in yourself. And you shouldn't expect life's most meaningful gifts to come through unchecked self-expression.

Most commencement addresses boil down to three sentiments:

1. You're amazing.
2. Follow your dreams.
3. Never give up.

The classic description of character is barely heard in today's moral exhortations. Which is why most graduation speeches posit a different set of virtues: differentiation, self-expression, confidence, and a "don't let other people stand in your way" stick-to-it-tiveness.

The cardinal virtues that anchored moral thought in the west for 2,500 years have been largely forgotten...today's courage--as self-willed perseverance--bears some semblance to the older definition, but missing are the accompanying virtues of patience and self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

On Father's Day, the message to dads is often similar to graduation speeches – step it up, man up, be strong, be courageous.

I recognize that this day is difficult for some of you because your dad is no longer here. On Tuesday night I spoke on Samson to about 50 teenage guys from Rock Island at Camp Summit, a ministry of Youth Hope, one of our Go Team partners. I emphasized how Samson was strong on the outside but because he never had self-control, romance and revenge led to his downfall. I got there early and was drawn to a withdrawn 16-year-old so sat with him for supper and for the singing time. His shoulders were slumped and he made no eye contact. I asked the camp director about his story and he said that his dad died just months ago.

Some of you have a dad who has deserted you. And there are dads here today who feel discouraged and others who've been dissed by their kids. Still others are delighted to be dads but don't really like the attention Father's Day brings.

Our text for today is often taken out of context: "Be strong and courageous." You'll often hear it quoted as a synonym for being tough and tenacious.

We're going to discover how the context of this phrase, which is actually used three times in Joshua 1, will help us grow not only as dads, but also as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Instead of just telling Joshua that because he's amazing he should follow his dreams and never give up, we're going to see that because God is amazing, He has some plans for Joshua. Because God is strong, Joshua can be courageous.

Lean in and listen to Joshua 1:1-9: "After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 "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. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. 4 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. 5 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 or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 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. 8 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. 9 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.”

It's now time for Joshua to graduate and become the leader God designed him to be. Before we get to his marching orders, let's set the scene.

A new generation is standing on the banks of the Jordan River wondering if they have the faith to do what their wandering parents did not. We begin to see a new phrase: “go over,” meaning “crossover.” This group of some two million people is poised to claim the promises of God but probably also frightened that they will commit the same sin as their parents, who died because of their disobedience. They are in a tough spot because their leader Moses is now dead. But they're on the verge of victory with only the Jordan River standing between them and Wisconsin, the land “flowing with milk and honey.”

They're not proud of their past but they're also frightened about the future. Can you relate? Maybe you're afraid of turning out like your ancestors did. Perhaps you've just been wandering in the wilderness, experiencing more failure than faithfulness.

Normally the Jordan River was pretty easy to cross but during flood season it was treacherous. In some sections the distance across would swell to over two miles. It's important to note that God calls his people to cross the Jordan when it is precisely at its most dangerous and when it seems the most impossible (see Joshua 3:15). The Jordan also served as a boundary between what the Israelites presently had and what God had promised them on the other side.

What's your Jordan River today? What barriers are you facing? Dads, where is God asking you to take a step of faith? If you're not sure what it is, ask yourself this question: “What am I afraid of?” Your fear will tell you. Symbolically in Scripture, the Jordan represents decision. Remember that your greatest extremity is God's grand opportunity.

We're going to see 5 leadership lessons from Joshua's life that can be applied to dads, and to any disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. Submit to the Purposes of God.

After Moses dies, the Lord speaks to Joshua, who had been serving as Moses' assistant in verse 2: “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.” Joshua may have felt inadequate and alone so God tells him to “arise,” which means, “to take decisive action by standing.” And then Joshua is told what His mission is – to “go over this Jordan with all this people.”

God makes it clear that this is His work. Just as He had used Moses, He will now use Joshua. God's plans did not die with the departure of one man because His work is not dependent on one man.

I admit that I was nervous about following Dr. Mel Brown, who faithfully and fervently preached the gospel here at Edgewood for 44 years! Since so many people asked me how I was doing at filling his shoes, I decided to address this during one of my early sermons. I stepped off to the side and said, “Many people have asked me how I'm doing filling Pastor Brown's shoes.” I then looked down at my feet and said, “I only wear a size 8...if I were to put my feet into his shoes; I couldn't even steer them!”

God used Pastor Brown by His grace and for His glory...and God is doing the same in and through each of us as we live on mission for His majesty.

2. Seize the Promises of God.

God always keeps His promises. Check out verse 3: “Every place that the sole of your feet will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised Moses.” Don't miss that the people had to get up and go into the land in order for it to become theirs. Its fascinating that God says, “I have given it to you” in verse 3 but in verse 2, we read, “I am giving it to them.” They have to take the territory and possess their possession. Interestingly, they are told to possess it more than twenty times!

The promise of land goes all the way back to Abraham in Genesis 12:7. Moses was given this promise in Deuteronomy 11:24: “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours.” Verse 4 gives the specs to the title of the land: “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.” Interestingly, this is far bigger than Israel ever claimed. This section covers about 300,000 square miles but the most Israel ever possessed was about 30,000 square miles, or 10%. Today the nation of Israel only has 8,000 square miles, or about 1/3 of that amount.

God also promises success in the first part of verse 5: “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life” and in the second part of verse 5, He promises to be right by their side: “Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or

forsake you.” The word “leave” refers to abandoning or dropping someone. We can count on His presence because it’s His promise. Romans 8:31: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

We’re to submit to the purposes of God and seize the promises of God. That’s lead to the third leadership lesson...stand on the precepts of God.

3. Stand on the Precepts of God.

Two different times God speaks these same words to Joshua: “Be strong and courageous” (1:6, 9). The word “strong” comes from twisting ropes together and “courageous” means to persist and conquer. In Joshua 1:7 God tells Joshua, “only be strong and very courageous.” The use of “only” has the idea of the “only thing to be done” and “very” means, “abundantly or exceedingly.”

The root for courage is the word encouragement, which literally means, “to put heart into.” When God sees our fears, He wants to fill us with courage. Isaiah 43:1-2 seems to reflect this historical situation: “...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you...”

It’s interesting that God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous three times. When something is repeated three times it communicates the greatest possible emphasis, like “holy, holy, holy” in Isaiah 6. In Deuteronomy 31, Moses charged Joshua with being strong and courageous three different times and in Joshua 1:18 the people say to Joshua: “...only be strong and courageous.” They promise to follow his leadership and then they tell him to not be afraid.

This is really cool. God is urging him to be strong and courageous and the people around him are cheering him on as well. Incidentally, that’s what I sense from each of you as you follow the leadership team here at Edgewood.

Look at Joshua 1:7: “...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.” And verse 8: “...be careful to do according to all that is written in it.” Assent is not sufficient; God is looking for consent.

Psalm 119:60: “I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.” Is there anything you’ve been putting off that you know God is telling you to do right now? If you’re disobeying, stop right now and confess it. Stick to Scripture and you’ll be successful.

Up until this point God spoke directly to His servants but now that things have been written down, we are called to read and heed His book. Joshua is told in verse 8: “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.”

- Talk about it. The Bible must be on our lips as we freely talk about it, quote it, and refer to it. This is especially important for dads and moms as seen in Deuteronomy 6:7: “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”
- Think about it. To meditate means to “chew on” or literally, “to mutter” or dialog with the Word. I’ve found that the best way to meditate is to first memorize and the best way to memorize is to first meditate. They go hand-in-hand. Listen to these words found in Psalm 119:97: “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” The one who meditates is called “blessed” in Psalm 1:1-2.
- Live it out. It must move from communication to meditation and then to application. The Word must freely flow from our lips but also must be evident in our lives. I love Deuteronomy 30:14: “But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it.”

We’re to submit to the purposes of God, seize the promises of God, stand on the precepts of God and fourthly, we’re to soak in the presence of God.

4. Soak in the Presence of God.

Don’t you love the fact that God is always with us? Joshua needed the assurance that God was now going to be with him. Look at Joshua 1:5: “...Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.” The Hebrew reads like this: “I will never make you sink; I will never drop you.” In Exodus 33:14, God says: “My Presence will go with you...” Friends, this same promise is given to believers today in Hebrews 13:5: “...Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

This reminds me of the 4-year-old who was trying to recite the Lord’s Prayer. One Sunday he prayed in a loud voice: “Our Father, who art in Heaven, I know you know my name.” Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you have the confidence that God knows your name and is with you right now? Some of us struggle when we can’t feel Him nearby but it is at those times that we must claim this

truth by faith.

As I was meditating on these verses, I saw something that I didn't see right away. The presence of God is like two pieces of bread in a sandwich, with strength and courage as the meat.

- "JUST AS I WAS WITH MOSES, SO I WILL BE WITH YOU." (Joshua 1:5)
- "Be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:6)
- "Only be strong and very courageous" (Joshua 1:7)
- "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:9)
- "FOR THE LORD IS WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO" (Joshua 1:9)

Listen. When you're struggling with being strong and you're caving instead of demonstrating courage, remember that you are surrounded by the presence of God! God's presence will give you the power to do what He's called you to do! You can have courage because of the character of God himself.

We're to submit to the purposes of God, seize the promises of God, stand on the precepts of God, we're to soak in the presence of God and finally, we're to stay on point.

5. Stay on Point with God.

Please turn to the last chapter of the Book of Joshua. The man Joshua is now about 110 years old and Joshua 24:2 says that he's speaking to "all the people." That means that his message is not just for dads, but also for everyone here today.

After reciting some history so they don't forget, Joshua rises up and challenges the people to respond because he knows they are faltering in verses 14-15: "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Joshua knows the human heart and how hard it is for us to surrender our wills to the Lord. He knows that we get complacent, we're prone to compromise and some of us procrastinate in order to avoid commitment.

Let's look at his four-fold challenge.

- Fear the Lord devotedly. The word "now" means in light of all God has done, we must tremble before Him and see him as holy.
- Serve the Lord exclusively. Joshua is calling his people to serve the Lord with all they have. The word "serve" in Hebrew comes from the same root as "worship" and is used 15 times in this chapter. Worship must lead to our working. Three times the people respond by saying that they will "serve the Lord" (18, 21, 24).
- Throw away idols totally. It's amazing how many times God's people were tripped up because they wouldn't incinerate their idols. The phrase, "throw away" literally means, "to turn off." The idea is that we throw them so far away that their power over us is extinguished.

An idol is really anything that is loved or feared more than God. It can involve the worship of a person, an image, object, activity or idea. Pastor Tim is leading a study for men this summer called "Gods at War" by Kyle Idleman to help identify idolatry in our hearts and then deal with it. They meet on the second and fourth Wednesday nights at 6:30 in the north overflow.

- Choose whom you will serve unreservedly. Would you notice that a choice is required? "Then choose..." This choice must also become very personal: "whom you..." and it's an urgent imperative: "Choose this day whom you will serve." Too many of us waver and hesitate and capitulate because we want to keep one foot in and one foot out. Spiritual indecision leads to disorientation. Or to say it another way: Indifference will lead to indecision.

I was struck by the story of the dad from Galesburg who was out fishing with his six-year-old son on the Mississippi. When his son fell into the river, the dad didn't hesitate and jumped in after him, trying to save him. He didn't survive but fortunately someone else helped his son back to shore. Talk about selflessness! This dad jumped in even though he couldn't swim because he wanted his son to live.

Check this out. As a father, Joshua is choosing to live out his faith for the sake of his family. It's as if he is saying: "I have chosen to serve the Lord, I am choosing to serve the Lord right now, and I will go on serving God until the very end." The Hebrew literally reads, "I myself." He is determining that his faith will be lived out at home: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua, as the head of his household declared, “AS FOR ME...” and then he included his household because he was going to lead them in the right paths. Don’t miss this, parents (and grandparents): You can’t pass something on to your children that you don’t have yourself.

As point man, Joshua is setting the spiritual temperature in his home because he’s the priest of his family. Studies have shown that the influence of a parent is two to three times more influential than any church program in passing along faith to the next generation.

I often think about the famous painting by Norman Rockwell that appeared on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post in 1959. It shows a suburban family going off to church, led by the oldest sister followed by the mother who is followed by the younger sister. All three women are dressed for church. Following them is a young boy who appears to be going with some reluctance. Why is he reluctant? Because at the center of the painting is dear old dad slumped in a chair, in his pajamas, reading the paper. As junior walks by he casts a longing eye at his father. He’s going to church but clearly he’d rather be with his dad.

Fellow fathers, as the point man in our homes, let’s lead our families!

When our daughters were much younger, one of them asked a great question. It went something like this: “Daddy, how can we know for sure that we’ll serve the Lord for the rest of our lives?” After pondering that question, we got hold of a big rock and wrote Joshua 24:15 on it: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Several years later, when we were on vacation (yes, in Wisconsin), I read this passage again to our family and encouraged each of us individually to make sure that we’re still going to follow the Lord. I asked each of them to find a rock and write Joshua 24:15 on it if they were serious about marking that moment with a declaration that they were going to serve the Lord for the rest of their lives.

Let’s summarize...

- Submit to the Purposes of God
 - Seize the Promises of God
 - Stand on the Precepts of God
 - Soak in the Presence of God
-
- Stay on Point with God

Dads, thanks for answering the call!

Taking the First Step Joshua 1-4

Brian Bill 1/7/07

A husband and wife were having problems remembering things, so they decided to go to the doctor. The doctor encouraged them to begin writing things down to see if that would help their memory. Later that night while watching TV, the husband got up from his chair and started toward the kitchen. His wife asked, “Where are you going?” “I’m going to the kitchen to get some ice cream,” he answered. She asked, “Will you get me a bowl while you’re there?” The husband replied, “Sure.” The wife, remembering what the doctor had said, asked, “Don’t you think you should write it down so you can remember it?” The husband rolled his eyes and said, “No, I can remember that.” “Well, I would also like some strawberries on top. You had better write that down because I know you’ll forget.” “No, I won’t forget,” he assured her. “OK, I also want some whipped cream on top. I know you’ll forget so you better write it down.” The husband was obviously irritated, but he managed to say rather nicely, “I don’t need to write that down. I can remember it.” About 20 minutes later, he returned and handed her a plate of bacon and eggs. She stared at it for a moment and then said, “I knew you couldn’t remember...You forgot my toast!” (Source: Paul Decker, www.sermoncentral.com).

The older I get the harder it is to remember things and that’s why I have to write almost everything down. God knew that we’d all have trouble remembering and so He made sure to record His revelation in a book we call the Bible. On this first Sunday in 2007 we’re beginning a twelve-part series called “Old Testament Journey II.” If you were here a year ago, you’ll recall that we spent nine weeks studying the first five books of the Bible (www.pontiacbible.org). We received a lot of positive feedback from this series but almost everyone mentioned that they wished we would have taken more time. While we won’t be going verse-by-verse we are going to go a bit slower this time. In order to get the most out of this study, I encourage you to plug into a small group. Each group will be

studying material written by Pastor Dick that is designed to help us apply during the week what we learn together on Sundays. A new group is starting tomorrow morning for those who work nights or who can't attend an evening study.

Deuteronomy ends with the nation of Israel still wandering in the wilderness, with the word "journeyed" used almost 90 times in the Book of Numbers. The Book of Joshua begins a new section in the Old Testament called the 12 historical books. This period covers approximately 1,000 years. As we come to the Book of Joshua, a new generation stands on the banks of the Jordan wondering if they have the faith to do what their parents did not. We begin to see a new word used meaning "crossover," which refers to a decisive moment in the history of Israel. This group of some two million people is poised to claim the promises of God but probably also frightened that they will commit the same sin as their parents, who died because of their disobedience. They are in a tough spot because their leader Moses is now dead. But they're on the verge of victory with only the Jordan River standing between them and the land "flowing with milk and honey."

They're not proud of their past but they're also frightened about the future. Can you relate? Maybe you're afraid of turning out like your ancestors did or as you review the past year, you know you didn't make the progress you wanted to. Maybe you've just been wandering in the wilderness, experiencing more failure than faithfulness. Loved ones; it's time to move forward! The early chapters of Joshua are packed with practical life lessons that can literally revolutionize your relationship with God because it's a book of new beginnings. You and I are going to face new situations and fresh problems this year but I'm confident that if we lock into these lessons, 2007 can be markedly different. As many of you know, I normally try to focus on just three or four key points in a sermon but I wasn't able to do that this week. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get this down to three points and a poem (don't tell my preaching professor at Moody). This section of Scripture is so rich and so practical that I came up with twelve, one for every month of the year. I recognize that you won't be able to remember them all, but I trust that several principles will resonate with you and that you'll be motivated to take some significant steps forward this year.

Before we jump in, it's important to understand some things about the Jordan River. This river starts on Mount Hermon at an elevation of 7,000 feet and ends at the Dead Sea, which is about 1,200 feet below sea level. The distance between the beginning and the end is 70 miles, but if you count all the twists and turns it actually travels about 200 miles. When the snow melts in the springtime, the water in the Jordan River flows very rapidly, cascading over 25 known rapids. Some have pointed out that the name "Jordan" in Hebrew means "river that descends rapidly." Normally it was pretty easy to cross but during flood season it was treacherous, and would fill a second and larger area called the Zor gorge. In some sections the distance across would swell to over two miles. On top of that, the banks of the gorge are essentially perpendicular. It's important to note that God calls his people to cross the Jordan when it is precisely at its most dangerous and when it seems the most impossible (see Joshua 3:15). The Jordan also served as a boundary between what the Israelites presently had and what God had promised them on the other side.

What's your Jordan River today? What barriers are you facing? Where is God asking you to take a step of faith? If you're not sure what it is, ask yourself this question: "What am I afraid of?" Your fear will tell you. Symbolically in Scripture, the Jordan represents decision. Remember that your greatest extremity is God's grand opportunity. Are we ready to dig into God's Word so that we can make some decisions that will radically redirect our lives?

1. Cultivate courage.

Joshua is now about 80-years-old and is called to lead the people across the Jordan and he is no doubt scared, insecure and uncertain how to do it. Moses has always been "the man" and now he is dead. He's a pretty big act to follow but God wants Joshua to know that Moses wasn't the act, God was. Two different times God speaks these same words to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous" (Josh 1:6, 9). In Joshua 1:7 God tells him to be "very courageous." The root for courage is the word encouragement, which literally means "to put heart into." When God sees our fears, He wants to fill us with courage. This is similar to the words spoken to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power..." Isaiah 43:1-2 seems to reflect this historical situation: "...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you..."

God commands Joshua to be courageous because those he is leading need him to have courage. Notice the last phrase in Joshua 1:18 where the people say: "...Only be strong and courageous." They promise to follow his leadership and then they tell him to not be afraid. This is really cool. God is urging him to be strong and courageous and the people around him are cheering him on as well. Friend, whatever you are worried about right now, God wants you to have courage to confront the issue and we want to rally around you too. May I challenge you to stay plugged into church this year so that you can receive encouragement and exhortation at least weekly? Knowing that there are some here right now who need to hear these words, let's say this phrase together: "Be strong and courageous." One other thought. Pastors sometimes get petrified as well. God speaks into us words of encouragement and on behalf of Pastor Dick and Pastor Jeff we want to say thanks for following our leadership and for encouraging us to be strong and courageous as we grasp the dream that God has for PBC.

We're really excited about our new mission statement that was approved by the Elders and Deacons this past week. You'll be

hearing more about this as we strive to make sure all of our ministries flow out of our mission. This was no easy task as we worked to capture in one sentence the essence of both the Great Commandment to love God and others and the Great Commission which calls us to make disciples. Here it is: "The mission of Pontiac Bible Church is to connect people to Jesus and equip them to be growing and faithful followers."

2. Don't make obedience optional.

Disobedience in a small thing is never a small matter. Do you remember why Moses was not allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the land of promise? As a result of his angry outburst when he smacked the rock twice instead of speaking to it, he was barred from the land of bounty. That doesn't seem fair in one sense but it is because God is just and He wants hearts of obedience from His holy people. Look at Joshua 1:7: "...Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left..." And verse 8: "...be careful to do everything written in it." Assent is not sufficient; God is looking for consent.

Do you find yourself making excuses for your sins? Determine in this New Year to say something like this: "God, since you've said it, I'll do it. Since you've said don't do it, I won't." Psalm 119:60: "I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands." Is there anything you've been putting off that you know God is telling you to do right now? If you're disobeying, stop right now and confess it.

3. Soak up Scripture.

Up until this point God spoke directly to His servants but now that things have been written down, we are called to read and heed His book. Joshua is told in Josh 1:8: "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." The key to success is to digest Scripture. It must be in our minds, in our hearts and in our mouths. The way God's Word gets inside us is through meditation, which literally means "to mutter" or dialog with the Word. Let me demonstrate a dialog I had this week with this verse. "God, I don't want to let the Bible depart or leave my lips. May it be in my mouth. How do I get it in my mouth? Day and night. Day and night. When it's light and when it's dark. So that. So that. When I do this I will be more open to obey. I can be careful to obey. Everything. Not just what I want. Prosperous. This is different than what the world says. Successful. I want to be successful. Successful in your sight."

I've found that the best way to meditate is to first memorize and the best way to memorize is to first meditate. They go hand-in-hand. Listen to these words found in Psalm 119:97: "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long." The man who meditates is called "blessed" in Psalm 1:1-2. I wasn't able to watch President Ford's funeral but I understand that Scripture was very prominent in the service. His son Jack read from Isaiah 40, his daughter Susan read from the Book of James and a pastor read from John 14:1-6. It's baffling to me why he left out one of the clearest statements made by Jesus in the entire Bible when he stopped before the final phrase in verse 6: "No one comes to the Father except through me." I'm hoping he just forgot but I think there was more going on than that.

I talked to a couple people this week who told me that they've drifted away from Bible reading. I think most people who stop reading Scripture don't do so intentionally, they just lack a plan. May I encourage you to read the Book of Joshua this month? When you're finished then read the Book of Judges and continue on through Esther. Let me give you a goal that may stick with you: "Take 11 in '07." If you aim to read eleven minutes a day in '07, God's Word will become dearer and clearer to you. We also have a one-year Bible Reading Plan available at the Welcome Center. This would be a good time to make a commitment to attend an adult IMPACT class on Sunday mornings, to join the monthly men's breakfasts for a study in Galatians, or one of the Women's Bible Studies. When the new Dive Deep schedule comes out, pick a class or two and commit to attend.

4. Practice the presence of God.

Don't you love the fact that God is always with us? Joshua needed the assurance that God was now going to be with him, just like He was with Moses. Look at Joshua 1:5: "...As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." The Hebrew reads like this: "I will never make you sink; I will never drop you." In Exodus 33:14, God says: "My Presence will go with you..." Friends, this same promise is given to believers today in Hebrews 13:5: "...Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

This reminds me of the 4-year-old who was trying to recite the Lord's Prayer. One Sunday he prayed in a loud voice during Sunday School: "Our Father, who art in Heaven, I know you know my name." Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you have the confidence that God knows your name and is with you right now? Some of us struggle when we can't feel Him nearby but it is at those times that we must claim this truth.

5. Worship while waiting.

In Joshua 1:11, we read: "...Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land..." In 3:5 they are told to worship and "consecrate" themselves. This word suggests separation but interestingly, it also means "shining." When we give ourselves fully to the Lord we're separated from selfish desires and we end up shining to those around us. Sanctification

must come before service because being right with God is our ultimate priority. While they are worshipping, they must wait for the third day. It's common for God to ask His people to wait patiently and some of you have been waiting for a long time. As they waited, they had a growing awareness of the human impossibility of what God was calling them to do. The river wasn't getting any lower or slower. They knew there were "giants" on the other side and they probably started feeling like grasshoppers again.

A three-day waiting period is common in Scripture.

- Joshua 3:2 "After three days the officers went through the camp..."
- Exodus 19:11 "Be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down."
- Esther 4:16 "When this is done [three days] I will go into the king."
- Hosea 6:2 "...on the third day He will restore us."
- Jonah 1:17 "...and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights." One pastor wondered if Jonah's prayer was, "God, just let me go out the same way I came in." Think about that...but not for too long!

John Ortberg points out that these Old Testament occurrences laid the groundwork for the ultimate third day, when Jesus was raised from the dead. This is the greatest day in the history of the world! From that day to this, Christ-followers have observed resurrection day on Sunday, not on Saturday. The apostle John refers to this in Revelation 1:10 as "the Lord's Day." Friends, we are third-day people now. Worship and wait for God to display His resurrection power in your life.

6. Move when God moves.

The key word in Joshua 3 and 4 is the word "ark," appearing 16 times. Joshua 3:3-4: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it." As we learned in the Old Testament Journey last year, the Ark of the Covenant was a sacred gold-covered chest that represented the very presence and power of God. Remembering that God is holy, they were to keep their distance as well. We must cultivate a healthy fear of God and guard against becoming too familiar with Him.

Here's the principle. We should only move when God moves. The priests went where they were sent. As Henry Blackaby has stated in his book, "Experiencing God," too many times we ask God to bless what we're doing when instead we should join God in what He is doing. Let's resolve to only go where God goes; to only do what God is doing and to maintain reverence in the process.

7. Wade into the water.

It's very striking to me that God does not stop the rushing water until the priests' feet hit the river. Joshua 3:15-16: "...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..." And because it's at flood stage and the gorge has filled with water, the perpendicular cliffs made stepping into the water very precarious. I wonder if the guy in the front turned to his buddies and said, "Hey I went first last time. One of you can take your turn now." They all knew that gold does not float. Here's the deal. If you focus on the flood, you'll fail to step foot into the fray.

As they were ten feet away, the river raged. One foot away and the water sprayed into their faces. One inch away and the mighty current showed no signs of letting up. But as soon as their feet touched the first wave the water receded.

On Christmas Eve afternoon I put our car topper on the van so I wouldn't have to do it on Christmas morning for our trip to the other Promised Land. We went to the Candlelight service and when we came home I forgot all about the car topper and pulled into the garage. The sound was terrible. I thought I had run over the dog. Because I was moving so fast the van made it half-way into the garage before we got stuck. I calmly got out of the van, looked at what had happened, and then went into the house, hoping Beth and the girls would figure out what to do. Actually I changed my clothes and when I came back a plan was in place. Just then Pat and Denice McGee stopped by and helped us out. It became obvious that the only way out was to pull forward, even though that didn't make much sense. I went forward several feet and then we were able to unhook the garage door, take the car topper off and get the problem solved.

Are you stuck right now? The best way out is to take a step forward. Some of us may be too lazy or too comfortable to step into the water. This past week in the Pantagraph I came across an article with this headline: "Man repeats as couch potato king." Unbelievably, Jason Pisarik watched TV for almost 40 hours straight. He received a leather recliner and a 42-inch high-definition TV because he outsat and outwatched all competitors. He defended his title from last year when he watched for 32 hours ("The Pantagraph," 1/4/07). This goes along with the recent study which found that the average American consumes 9 hours of media each day!

Are you a couch potato or a media magnet? We can't be passive about experiencing God's promises. He parts the waters when we walk in, not before. We must believe then we'll see. When we tell God that we'll follow, then He'll lead us. Are you waiting for the

waves of life to calm down before you trust Him? God wants you to take the first step. It's only then that you'll see His power displayed in amazing ways.

8. God provides through our planning.

In Joshua 1:11, Joshua says: "Get your supplies ready." It's interesting, isn't it, that the people have to get organized even though God is the ultimate provider. They have to get over the "manna mindset" that God's provision will keep falling from the sky and now they must start planning. Some people prefer to say that we just need to trust God to do everything while others trust only in themselves. It's really not an either/or deal but a both/and equation. God will ultimately provide but we're called to plan as well.

9. Personalize God's promises.

The word "inheritance" is used 49 times in Joshua, while the word "possession" is used 9 times. God had already committed to give them the land but they had to conquer it first. Unfortunately, according to Joshua 13:1, Israel never quite took all that was theirs: "... there are still very large areas of land to be taken over." Even after entering Canaan, Joshua 18:3 asks the question: "How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?"

Someone has said that we can have all that we will take. Related to this, while we have an amazing inheritance, we must claim it. God gives but we must take what He offers. There is a fight to be fought and a race to run. Unfortunately, too many Christians live and die never realizing all that God had for them.

Friend, according to 2 Peter 1:3, we have been given "everything we need for life and godliness..." Ephesians 1:3 says that God has already "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Romans 8:37 declares that "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." How long will you wait to take possession of what the Lord has already given to you?

10. Toil as a team.

We don't have the time to fully develop this point but Moses allowed two and a half tribes to stay on the east side of the Jordan River (Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh). While a case could be made that this was not God's original design, Joshua wants to remind these tribes that they must work as a team in Joshua 1:14: "You are to help your brothers." This is the principle of partnership.

Let me make a couple points.

First, these two-and-a-half tribes settled for something good at the expense of what was best. Because they had a lot of sheep, they were attracted to the good grazing in the land of Moab and shunned the land of promise. As a result, they became soft spiritually and complacent in their commitment. Sadly, too many Christians today are like this. They've experienced new life in Christ but are not living the abundant life promised by Jesus. Psalm 106:15: "So He gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them."

Second, these tribes did toil as a team. Most of them jumped in and helped, showing the importance of teamwork. They did bear their share. Some commentators point out however, that they weren't whole-hearted in their participation, only sending about a third of their fighting men to help. The others stayed home. Friend, you are needed at PBC. Don't sit on the sidelines and don't be half-hearted in your efforts. This is where you need to be on Sunday mornings; it's important to make a small group your support system; and then to make sure you're serving according to your spiritual gifts. Don't be a borderline believer. One other point to make is that when trouble came, these tribes were the first ones swept away by the Assyrians. Could it be because they were disconnected from God's community and out on their own? Don't make the same mistake in '07. We need you...and you need us.

11. God uses the unworthy.

In Joshua 2, we see that God protected a pagan prostitute named Rahab, not because of her lies but because of her faith. Rahab is remembered in the New Testament as a woman of faith, even appearing in the family tree of Jesus. Friend, don't believe the lie that God could never use you because of what you've done or how you've been living. The last time I checked, God only uses unworthy people. Just as Rahab was saved through a scarlet thread, we are saved through the scarlet blood of Jesus.

12. Make a memorial so you don't forget

In chapter 4, God tells Joshua to choose twelve men, one from each tribe, and to go back out into the middle of the Jordan and pick up twelve stones. Carrying them on their shoulders, they are to set them up as a memorial for the people of Israel. God knows that we forget things quickly so He wants us to make memorials to jog our memories. These "speaking stones" were especially important

for children, for when they ask, “What do these stones mean?” they will be able to recount what God did in bringing Israel across the Jordan River. It’s not by accident that Joshua 4:19 tells us that the people crossed the Jordan “on the tenth day of the first month,” which is the exact time that Israel celebrated the first Passover before leaving Egypt 40 years earlier. This would have jogged their memories.

Shortly after we moved here, one of our daughters asked Beth and me a question that went something like this: “How can we be sure that we will always love the Lord?” In an attempt to mark this moment, we looked around for a rock and had a little ceremony as a family where we determined by God’s grace to love and serve Him for the rest of our lives. Beth then wrote Joshua 24:15 on the rock: “But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” This rock [hold up] sits on our fireplace ledge in our living room as a reminder of this commitment.

We still have memory markers today. We have an opportunity to participate in an ordination celebration that will be a landmark moment for Pastor Jeff next Sunday night. I encourage you to come at 6:00 p.m. and show your support for him. Baptism is also a memory marker and a time in which we profess publicly that we belong to Christ. If you’ve never been baptized as a believer, we’ll be scheduling a service this spring. Simply contact the church office to get on the list. Communion is also a memory marker. It’s a time for us to remember what Jesus did for us, in providing a bridge as John 5:24 states: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” We too can “crossover” the border between sin and sweetness into a full experience of God’s promises through faith in Jesus.

God doesn’t want us to forget so He’s written it all down for us. One night Jesus had a meal with 12 of his friends – it wasn’t bacon and eggs but it did involve elements that would bring the Passover and the Crossover back to life. We’re called to remember this and reenact the basics so we don’t forget.

Watching the Walls Fall Joshua 5-6

Brian Bill 1/14/07

[Video Drama: “The Speculators”]

There’s a big difference between just thinking about something and actually doing it. As we learned last week from the opening chapters of Joshua, God called His people to take the first step if they ever hoped to cross the Jordan River. Now that they’re on the other side, they’re faced with incredible obstacles and amazing opportunities. Likewise, you and I are faced with multiple situations where God calls us to not just think about making a move but to actually do it. Some of us have thought about thinking of doing something but we haven’t moved far from the comfort of our couches.

Actually, before we think about “doing,” God wants us to focus on our “being.” Our work must flow out of our worship, our serving out of our sanctification. We’ll notice that there is something more impenetrable and imposing than the walls of Jericho; it’s the will of Joshua. That must be dealt with first. God wants our wills to fall before the walls that we’re facing will fall. Here’s a one-sentence summary of the sermon today: The walls fall only after the will falls.

Isn’t it tough when we don’t know why God does things the way He does? Many times we’re left in the dark but there are occasions when God explains Himself very clearly. God chose to have His people cross the Jordan when it was at flood stage because He loves to do that which seems impossible to us. He wants our wills to fall in submission to His will and then He does His work. We see two reasons why He did what He did in Joshua 4:24: “He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.” Let’s look at God’s purpose for bringing His people into the Promised Land.

Why God Does What He Does

1. To demonstrate His honor to all people.

God has a missionary heart; His plan of redemption has always included all the peoples of the earth. That’s one reason we are proposing to take on the support of three new missionary candidates. Each one is working in the least-reached part of the world, commonly referred to as the 10/40 window. The 10/40 Window is an area that contains the largest population of non-Christians in the world. Of the 55 least evangelized countries more than 45 are located in this region. This “final frontier” of missions extends from 10 degrees to 40 degrees north of the equator, and stretches from North Africa to China. I encourage you to stop by the bulletin board in the hallway to get to know these couples better. We’ll also be sending information to PBC members before our business

meeting on February 13th because we'll be voting on whether or not to add these servants to our missionary family:

- Mike and Robin Wahls (Ghana)
- Dirk and Jamie Kaiser (Kazakhstan)
- Andrew and Alanna Brown (Turkey)

The pagan prostitute Rahab certainly understood something of God's greatness when she said in Joshua 2:11: "...For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth above." We know that the people in the land of Canaan were well aware of God's power in Joshua 5:1: "Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites."

2. To display His holiness to His people.

God has chosen to bless the earth through His chosen people but that will only happen if they revere Him. And they won't revere Him until they submit and surrender to Him. The walls fall only after the will falls. In chapter five we see that before they can conquer others, they must first allow God to conquer them. They have to get some things right with Him before they can fight for Him. The same is true for us. We want to do something for God, or maybe we just think about doing it, and God says, "Slow down. I want to make sure you've surrendered your will to my will." Jericho was the first visible obstacle ahead of them but it was not the first thing that had to be dealt with. The outward never is. The biggest problem is always me and my will. Before Jericho could be taken care of, the junk inside Joshua had to be dealt with. We see three ways in which God begins to break down their wills in Joshua 5.

- Covenant Renewal. In verse 2 we read: "At that time the LORD said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.'" Circumcision was the sign that they were God's covenant people, first given to Abraham in Genesis 17:11: "You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you." When they were wandering in the desert for 40 years, the older generation had died but their sons had never been circumcised. It was critical that this happen according to Genesis 17:14: "Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." This renewal was a reminder that God had not left them and that He would fulfill all His promises to them.

While every Jewish male understood the importance of this, it certainly didn't seem to make for good military strategy! It would have made much more sense to do this when they were on the east side of the Jordan. Without going into great detail, the procedure would certainly have incapacitated the men for a few days. Imagine what it would have been like for a soldier in the army of Israel who had probably been thinking through some military strategy. Now you're laid up for a few days. You've crossed into enemy territory and are poised to march in and take the land. The Jordan River is roaring behind you so you have no escape route if your enemies come after you. God's people must learn that His ways are always best. God's essentially asking: "Do you really trust me? Do you believe I can protect you? Will you obey even when it seems outrageous to do so?" Everything about this seems designed to point out that God's ways are not our ways.

- Spiritual Renewal. The second step in surrender is for them to slow down and celebrate the Passover. It had been about 39 years since they had observed this important reminder of how God had freed them from Egypt. God had delivered them through sacrifice, substitution and satisfaction of a perfect lamb's life. According to verse 11, the day after Passover, they ate some of the produce of the land and the manna stopped. God was now going to provide for them from the land. He's actually taking away something that they no longer need and giving them another opportunity to trust Him. He does the same with us, doesn't He? What has God taken from you recently because He wants you to trust Him more fully?
- Mission Renewal. Joshua is probably chomping at the bit, ready to take on the task ahead of him. The men are now circumcised and Passover has been celebrated. He's ready to rumble. But God knows he's not quite ready because his will has not yet fully fallen before Him. Verse 13 tells us that Joshua was near Jericho, likely scouting out the situation so he could come up with a strategy. The third step Joshua needed to take was to have an encounter with the Almighty: "...He looked up [maybe he had been looking down] and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, 'Are you for us or for our enemies?'" This is what theologians refer to as a "theophany," or a manifestation of God that is tangible to the human senses. I think it was actually a "christophany," an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ.

Whatever the case, Joshua does what we tend to do. He wants God to be on his side and against the other side. We often think in

terms of win/lose with people. Specifically, I'm right and you're wrong. My music is better than your music; my political views are correct and yours are not; and the Badgers are better than the Illini. It's far better to think in terms of win/win and to remember that we must be on the Lord's team. The answer Joshua receives in verse 14 is jolting: "Neither. But as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." It's the wrong question to ask God whose side He is on. The right question is this: Am I on His side? We don't recruit Him; He recruits us. We can't use Him; we should delight that He uses us. Notice that He is a warrior with a sword drawn. We need to get out of the way, fall to our knees and jump back into line. We're not in charge; God is.

Joshua's will finally falls when we read: "Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, 'What message does my Lord have for his servant?'" Do you see it? Joshua refers to God as "Lord" and sees himself as "servant." Joshua's will had to fall down before the walls would fall because the walls fall only after the will falls. This is really important because the mission Joshua is about to receive would not make much sense if had not surrendered to God's will. One more thought before we leave chapter 5. Bringing back memories of Moses' encounter with God on the mountain in Exodus 3:5, Joshua is commanded in verse 15 to "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." Joshua did so immediately. In a similar way, we must see God as holy. Exodus 20:20 tells us "...that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." Here's the deal. If we don't view God as holy, we won't surrender our will to His will and we'll sin at will as well.

We come now to Joshua 6, which begins a section up through Joshua 12 that focuses on one battle after another. Chapters 13-22 explain how the land is divided up between the tribes and the final two chapters deal with Joshua's farewell speech. We spent some significant time in chapter 5 because I believe that the toughest task was for Joshua's will to be conquered, not Jericho's walls. The real battle of Jericho was fought right here and it was won when Joshua fell to the ground because the walls fall only after the will falls. Once Joshua has surrendered, Jericho's surrender becomes imminent. Friend, what about you? Have you surrendered to God's will? Are you living in covenant relationship with Him? Are you spiritually in tune with Him? And have you settled the servanthood issue so you can hear His message and participate in His mission?

Mighty Jericho

Archaeologists tell us that Jericho was not a big city, covering some 10 or so acres (a bit bigger than the size of our church property) with up to 20,000 inhabitants. It was located about five miles west of the Jordan River and was the spiritual center of moon-worship. Because of its strategic location it controlled a wide area of land and God's people would have to deal with this city if they were to take possession of the Promised Land. Standing at the foot of the western hills of Canaan, the Israelites couldn't go into the area with Jericho standing because they would have been attacked.

The city was built to withstand any invasion. The walls were anywhere from 30 to 60 feet high and from 12 to 45 feet thick, depending on which commentator or archaeologist you consult. We do know that the wall was so wide that one could drive a chariot on the top and that Rahab had her house there. Huge gates were reinforced with iron and were impregnable. This city was also important from a morale point of view. This was Israel's first challenge and if they lost it would be disastrous. But God was most concerned with what He wanted to teach them spiritually. They needed to walk by faith knowing that the walls fall only after the will falls.

Joshua 6:1 gives us a picture of how petrified the people in Jericho are: "Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one went in." This is a fulfillment of Exodus 23:27: "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." Because of fear the people of Jericho were hunkered down. Archaeologists have discovered large jars of grain at Jericho which indicates that they were stocking up to withstand a long siege. The phrase "tightly shut up" also implies arrogant confidence that no one could harm them.

Practical Principles

Let's take a look at what happened next. Keep in mind that because of what God first did inside Joshua in the previous chapter, these outward steps while successful are secondary. These timeless principles have direct application to our lives.

1. We fight from victory, not for victory

Notice Joshua 6:2: "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men." In the Hebrew this actually reads: I have already delivered Jericho into your hands. This is a very important point.

When Joshua and his people looked at the city they were to see it as already defeated. Likewise, in our lives, we must see that the victory is already ours as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:57: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In the language of Romans 6:11, we are to "count ourselves as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." It's already true, but we must reckon it as so. Jesus has conquered sin but we must claim that truth in our life.

Let me illustrate. The staff has always known that this church is generous and gracious. This was evident once again when we

received our Christmas bonuses. Thank you so much! When I received the check and saw the amount I was humbled and happy. Now, I could hang on to this check for a year or two and have happy thoughts about all of you but if I never endorse it and put it into my account, I won't enjoy the benefits. Likewise, Joshua and his people were told that the victory had been won but until they acted on it, the victory would not have been theirs.

2. God expects exact obedience.

In Monday's Pantagraph I read an article about the 10th Annual "Wacky Warning Label Contest." The top prize went to this tag on a front-loading washing machine: "Do not put any person in this washer." Coming in second was this label on a boat: "Never use a lit match or open flame to check fuel level." My favorite was found on a cell phone: "Don't try to dry your phone in a microwave oven."

Let's be honest. The message God was giving to His people seems funny and a bit wacky as well. Verses 3-5 summarize what God commanded the people to do: "March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 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. 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." While this probably seemed silly and not very strategic to the armed men, they chose to obey anyway. I'm struck by the excruciating detail and the need for daily repetition. Sometimes God just wants us to keep doing what we're doing, day in and day out; as long as we're being obedient.

If we were to read the rest of the chapter we would discover this order in the parade lineup: The armed men were out front, followed by seven priests with seven trumpets. Next in line was the Ark of the Covenant, followed by the rear guard of troops. The trumpets were to keep sounding while this processional marched around the city once a day for six days. There are at least two kinds of trumpets used in the Old Testament. These particular trumpets were shofars, made from the horns of rams, and were used to announce the joyful Jubilee and the coming of the King. Commentators estimate that this trip around the city took from 30 minutes to an hour each day.

On the seventh day, they got up early and marched around seven times. All the people were with them this time and after hearing a long blast they were to give a loud shout. Most commentators estimate that this would have taken up to 14 hours because everyone was now involved. I'm reminded of the song sung by the enemies on Veggie Tales' "Josh and the Big Wall" that goes like this: "Keep walking but you won't knock down our wall. Keep walking but she isn't going to fall. It's plain to see, your brains are very small...to think walking, will be knocking down our wall." This was a very unusual strategy but shows us the truth of what God says in Isaiah 55:8: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

I was on the wrestling team in high school and wasn't very good, winning only about half my matches. My greatest embarrassment was getting pinned during our homecoming match in something like 15 seconds! On occasion I would win by forfeit either because the other guy was injured or was scared to get on the mat with me (not). I still needed to weigh in and put my uniform on but I didn't have to wrestle. I would be declared the winner and my team received six points. Because the Israelites walked by faith they won by forfeit when the walls fell. They were declared the victors even though they had done nothing but simply obey.

3. We must be patient while God works.

God could have wiped out Jericho immediately but he chose to wait a week. They walked around a total of 13 times in 7 days and nothing happened. The walls just stood there, mocking them. My guess is that the enemies were ridiculing them as well. I wonder if the Israelites felt like they were just going in circles and not getting anywhere. Have you ever felt like that? Sometimes God wants us to keep plugging away, being patient as we trust that He knows what He's doing. One pastor suggests that the reason it took so long for the walls to fall is because it took seven days for the Israelite's attitudes to change. I would put it this way: The walls fall only after the will falls.

Impatience was one of Israel's besetting sins. Hebrews 6:12 tells us that they eventually learned how to be patient, perhaps in large part by walking around this city: "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." Abraham was given the promise of a son and had to wait 25 years for Isaac to be born. If you've been waiting, hang in there. Don't despair. Don't bail. Keep walking.

4. God wants us to be quiet and confident.

Josh 6:10 says: "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!" God didn't want them to do any trash-talking while they walked around the walls nor did he want them to complain or murmur about how stupid and silly this all was. Their parents were well-known for being complainers out in the desert and it's as if God doesn't want to give them the opportunity to make this same mistake. By keeping quiet, they also couldn't discourage each other by sharing their fears. This was one more way that God was calling them to surrender their wills to Him. After all, as James 3:2 says, if we can keep quiet and control our tongue, we can "keep the whole body in check." We need to apply the words of Exodus 14:14: "The LORD will

fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Here’s the principle: Don’t dialog with the devil. We’re invited in Psalm 46:10 to “be still and know that I am God.” Interestingly, this psalm was written when Jerusalem was under attack. When we’re quiet our confidence in God will grow and in the process we’ll get to know Him better.

5. Faith brings victory.

One Sunday a teacher asked his Sunday School class this question: “Who broke down the walls of Jericho?” One young boy quickly responded, “It wasn’t me, sir!” Joshua would have answered the same way. It was God at work and it was faith that accomplished it. Hebrews 11:30 tells us that the walls came down not by force, firepower or fighting...but by faith: “By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.” God wants us to move out by faith and then He does His work. They shouted before the walls got wobbly. It’s interesting that Joshua’s name is not used at all in Hebrews 11. The other heroes of faith are listed like this: “By faith Moses...by faith Isaac...by faith Jacob...by faith Abel.” The emphasis here is that God wiped out the walls and He did it when the people put their faith in Him. All the glory is His, as it should be.

There’s a difference between faith and fact. A minister once tried to demonstrate the difference by saying to the congregation: “It’s a fact that you are sitting in pews. It’s a fact that I’m standing behind this pulpit. But it’s only by faith that I believe that you are listening to me.” Friends, if God said it; I believe it and that settles it.

The Israelites got it right in chapter 6 because they moved out by faith but in chapter 7 they focus on the facts and they get it all wrong. After spying out the next city to conquer, they were filled with pride and overconfidence: “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” (7:3). Trusting in their own strength, the Israelites were routed and their courage melted. Not only did they neglect to consult the Lord, they lost because a man named Achan sinned by deliberately disobeying God’s clear commands which caused God’s anger “to burn against Israel” (7:1). We must be constantly on guard against overconfidence and be vigilant to make sure we deal with “sin in the camp.”

I heard about an enthusiastic preacher who was exhorting his congregation to become more active and to get moving: “Brothers and sisters, what this church needs is the energy to get up and walk.” One of the members shouted out: “Let her walk brother, let her walk.” The preacher, feeling energized now, said a bit louder: “But we cannot be satisfied with walking, we’ve got to pick up speed and run.” The same member chimed in: “Let her run preacher, let her run!” The pastor was really into the message now and declared: “Running is not enough either. One of these days the church has got to fly!” The same member replied, “Let her fly preacher, let her fly.” The preacher then said, “But if this church is going to fly, we’re all going to have to work harder and give more.” To which the member said with little enthusiasm: “Let her walk brother, let her walk.”

Friends, it’s time to not just think about thinking about making a decision. It’s time to put feet to our faith. I close with two questions.

1. Will you right now, to the best of your ability, fully surrender to the Lord? The battle is not always against other things but is often with ourselves. It might involve giving or forgiving. The walls fall only after the will falls.
2. What’s your Jericho today? What insurmountable obstacle are you facing? Will you trust God enough to do something that feels and looks foolish? Will you take the risk?

- Fight from victory, not for victory
- Obey God exactly
- Be patient while God works
- Be quiet and confident
- Exhibit faith

This isn’t really my personality and it’s not really the practice of our church but I wonder if we could work at shouting to the Lord? Shouting in Scripture has to do with excitement, celebration or even warning. While we’re accustomed to doing this at sporting events, we are less comfortable doing so in church. I’m not sure why that is. If a sports team can get us excited, shouldn’t the God of the universe be worthy of our applause?

Joshua 6:16: “Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!” Drop down to verse 20: “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.”

Numbers 23:21: “The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them.”

1 Samuel 4:5: “When the ark of the Lord’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.”

Ezra 3:11-13: "With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: 'He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.' And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away."

We're going to end our service today by singing "Shout to the Lord." Let's do so with gusto.

My Jesus, My Savior

Lord there is none like You

All of my days, I want to praise

The wonders of Your mighty love

My Comfort, My Shelter

Tower of refuge and strength

Let every breath, all that I am

Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth

Let us sing. Power and majesty, praise to the King.

Mountains bow down and the seas will roar

At the sound of Your name

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands

Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand

Nothing compares to the promise I have in

Nothing Compares to the promise I have in YOU!

Choosing to Serve Joshua 24:14-15

Sanctity of Life Sunday

Brian Bill 1/21/07

I've always been fascinated by what people say right before they die. These last words are often indelibly etched on people's minds.

- Bing Crosby: "That was a great game of golf, fellas."
- Alexander Graham Bell: "No."
- P.T. Barnum: "How were the circus receipts in Madison Square Garden?"
- Harry Houdini: "I'm tired of fighting! I guess this thing is going to get me." (Houdini would often tighten his stomach muscles and invite strong men to punch him. One day he was punched before he could brace himself and his gut ruptured and he died).
- Mother Teresa: "Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you." (See also interesting articles [Mother Teresa - The Gospel Coalition](#) and [The Myth Of Mother Teresa](#))
- Michael Faraday: "I shall be with Christ, and that is enough."

When Joshua came to the end of his life, he preached a very poignant and practical sermon. Today we'll finish our overview study of this key book and next week we'll take a look at the Book of Judges. Two weeks ago we learned that if we want to see God do His

work in our life, we must take the first step. Last week we were challenged with this truth: The walls fall only when our will falls.

In chapter 24, Joshua assembled all the people together, along with all the leaders, and he preached to them as they “presented themselves before God.” In the first 10 verses, he summarizes the nation’s history and then in verses 11-12 he recounts what had taken place in the years since they crossed the Jordan River. Joshua’s concerns at the end of his life are the same ones he had for the people after they crossed the Jordan River. It’s obvious that he’s not focused on himself but on others. It’s a characteristic of an older godly person to be focused on the future. This is actually the fourth call to covenant renewal in the Book of Joshua, showing that we need multiple opportunities and regular challenges to make sure we are living out what we know to be true.

Joshua longs for his people to be faithful and so he lays out a challenge for them in verses 14-15: “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua knows the human heart and how hard it is for us to surrender our wills to the Lord. He knows that we get complacent, we’re prone to compromise and some of us procrastinate in order to avoid commitment. Let’s look at his challenge.

1. Fear the Lord devotedly.

The word “now” means in light of all that God has done, we must tremble before Him and see him as holy. Proverbs 15:33: “The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom.” Proverbs 19:23: “The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.” And this is not just an Old Testament concept for Hebrews 12:29 says that “our God is a consuming fire.” A.W. Tozer once said, “What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.”

2. Serve the Lord exclusively.

Joshua is calling his people to serve the Lord with all they have. The word “serve” in Hebrew comes from the same root as “worship.” Worship must lead to our working. Three times the people respond by saying that they will “serve the Lord” (18, 21, 24).

Here’s the rub. You’re going to serve somebody. In fact, you do serve somebody right now. It’s either self, Satan or the Savior. And by not serving God you are choosing to serve self and Satan. To not decide is to decide by default for the dark side. Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

3. Throw away idols totally.

It’s amazing how many times God’s people were tripped up because they wouldn’t throw away their idols. The phrase, “throw away” literally means “to turn off.” The idea is that we throw them so far away that their power over us is extinguished. The problem for many of us is that we don’t throw them away; instead we keep them close by. In fact, we can infer from this verse that God’s people still had some idols with them. Look at verse 23: “Throw away the foreign gods that are among you...” This was a huge problem throughout their history. It’s as if they wanted a spiritual security blanket; something they could fall back on if God didn’t work out.

An idol is really anything that is loved or feared more than God. It can involve the worship of a person, an image, object or idea. John Piper reminds us that the things that take our attention are not always evil in and of themselves: “They are your basic... gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and talking...and all of them can be deadly substitutes for God.” John Calvin once referred to the human heart as an “idol factory.” Joshua is urging them to consider their options and then to make a choice:

- They could go way back and worship the gods that Abraham did. These gods offered spiritual highs and a reliance on mysticism and astrology.
- They could go back to the gods of Egypt. This religion was steeped in materialism. In one sense, these gods were the most attractive because Egypt represented power and prestige. Even though the Hebrews were slaves for 400 years, the land itself and its culture offered a pretty impressive place to live.
- They could commit to the idols of the Amorites. This way of life offered sensuality, emotional fulfillment and an emphasis on outward success. These Canaanite gods are still worshipped today.

If they didn’t get rid of their idols, they would eventually forsake the Lord. Hebrews 3:12: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

I watched portions of American Idol this week and had to turn it off twice. Two things bothered me about the show. The first is that success and stardom seems like a god for many people. This is evidenced by the reaction many have when they don’t make the cut. They can barely handle it. But the second reason I turned it off is because the judges are just plain mean. As I watched and listened

to them slice and dice the contestants I found myself hurting for the singers. How can I say that I am pro-life and believe that everyone has dignity and worth in God's eyes and secretly applaud when these image bearers of God are incinerated on national TV?

Having said that, don't you find it interesting that the show is called American Idol? Do you think we have any idols in America? What are some of them? Just shout them out. The very last verse of John's first letter ends with a warning about idols. 1 John 5:21: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." Throw them away and then keep them away.

4. Choose whom you will serve.

This is an immediate imperative: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." The Lord is Yahweh, who is highly relational. He is involved with them and has fought for them. He has revealed Himself and continually offers love to them. Joshua declared his devotion to the Lord. As we learned last week his will is surrendered and because of that He has decided that he and his household will serve the Lord. Too many of us waver and hesitate and capitulate to what is politically correct. We want to keep one foot in and one foot out. It was G.K. Chesterton who said, "The Christian life has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and left untried." Spiritual indecision leads to disorientation.

Hundreds of years later, Elijah framed the question this way in 1 Kings 18:21: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him. But the people said nothing." I like the translation that says, "How long will you go limping between two opinions?" Did you catch that last part? The people said nothing. There's something within us that resists making a commitment. We'd rather not choose a side. Maybe it's because we want to keep our options open. Or more likely we know that to choose God means we have to surrender to Him, and frankly we don't want to do that.

Joshua has decided to serve God. It's as if he is saying: "I have chosen, I am choosing, and I will forever choose." The Hebrew literally reads, "I myself." He is coming down squarely on the side of the Lord. D.L. Moody once heard someone say: "The world has yet to see what God can do with a life totally surrendered to Him." His response is similar to Joshua's: "I will be that man." God is still looking for men and women and boys and girls who are totally surrendered to Him. Will you be that man or woman?

Choose the Lord, Choose Life

On this Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, we affirm, along with thousands of other churches, that every person from conception on, is an image bearer of God, stamped with divine dignity and worthy of protection. Proverbs 31:8-9 challenges us to speak for those who have no voice: "Speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." We're called to reach out with care, courage and compassion to those who not only never have a chance to say their final words; they aren't allowed to say their first ones either.

Some pastors have chosen, for various reasons, to remain silent on this topic or to even approve of abortion. I don't see either as an option this morning. Where God has spoken, I must speak. This past week we hosted the Pontiac Area Ministerial Association and I encouraged fellow pastors to speak up for life in their sermons today because there might be someone in our services who is contemplating abortion. I didn't get the sense that we all see this issue the same way but I felt led to say it anyway. My goal is not to be politically correct but to be biblically correct. We're compelled and constrained to communicate God's heart as clearly as we can, with as much love as we can. Proverbs 14:25 summarizes our purpose and our hope: "A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful."

I want to submit to you this morning that while abortion is, and should be debated politically, discussed emotionally, and described medically, at its primary roots, abortion is a moral issue, and as such, must be defined biblically. We must begin by recognizing the value of every created person – the preborn, the newborn, the orphan, the widow, the disabled, the mentally challenged, those with AIDS, the elderly, those in hospice, and those we might not care for because they have a different colored skin or religion than we do.

Here are 8 biblical truths that establish the preborn as not only viable, but valuable.

1. The preborn are called "babies." "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb..." (Luke 1:41).
2. The life of the preborn is protected by the same punishment for injury or death as that of an adult. "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely...if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life." (Exodus 21:22-23).
3. Christ was fully human from the point of conception. "...Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son..." (Matthew 1:20-21).

4. Preborn children have a propensity to sin. "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5).
5. Personal pronouns are used to describe preborn children. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..." (Jeremiah 1:5).
6. God calls people to ministry even before they are born. "Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name." (Isaiah 49:1).
7. God creates the preborn. "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." (Psalm 139:13).
8. God knows the preborn intimately and personally. "My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body..." (Psalm 139:15-16)

We need to know what the Bible says about the beginning of life. However, since some people don't accept the Bible as the ultimate truth source, we can also argue for the value and sanctity of the preborn by focusing on the baby's development in the womb.

A Womb With a View

If we could somehow give mothers a window to their womb, it would become unmistakably clear that so-called "fetal tissue" is really a frolicking toddler-to-be. This past Sunday night, National Geographic ran a special called "Multiples in the Womb" that showed a twin leaning over and kissing the cheek of her sister while both are in the womb. They also showed a picture of triplets snuggling together. These images are from www.nationalgeographic.com.

A television commercial for GE's new ultrasound system shows a pregnant woman and her husband marveling at an amazingly clear picture of their unborn baby's features. The announcer says: "When you see your baby for the first time...it really is a miracle." Here's a picture of a 17-week-old fetus no bigger than a newborn kitten that appeared in TIME magazine (11/03/02). By the way, the word fetus is the Latin word for "young one" or "offspring." These actual images appear in live-action and in full color.

When we survey Scripture and ponder pictures of the preborn, there is no doubt that human life begins at conception and as such must be celebrated and protected. As we remembered Martin Luther King's impact on human rights this past Monday, let's also recognize that we still have a long way to go to protect the greatest of all human rights – the right to life for the preborn. One quote from Martin Luther King seems particularly poignant when it comes to this issue: "There comes a time when silence is betrayal."

Moving Toward Life

Have you heard the good news about the declining abortion rate in America? You wouldn't necessarily know this from mainstream magazines, but the number of abortions has been falling for a number of years.

I'd like to suggest that there are some reasons for this:

1. A purity resurgence.

About three years ago, USA Today reported that the U.S. abortion rate has been declining in part because there are an increasing number of young people abstaining from premarital sex (1/16/03, <http://usatoday.com>). In a recently published book called, "The New Faithful," Colleen Carroll traces the grassroots movement of a new generation of teenagers who reject abortion and sexual license. These young people make purity pledges and swarm the National Mall each year to march for life. About four years ago, Newsweek did a cover story called, "The New Virginity: Why More Teens Are Choosing Not to Have Sex" (12/9/02). If more people would submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ and commit to sexual fidelity, there is no doubt that the abortion rate would go down even more drastically.

2. Attitudes on abortion are changing.

A recent Gallup survey shows that teenagers today are more pro-life than the general adult population. 72% of teens said they believe abortion is "morally wrong" while just 26% of adults agree with this statement. Focus on the Family reports that there is a clear trend among both men and women toward restricting abortion.

3. The influence of Caring Pregnancy Centers.

We are very blessed to have the Caring Pregnancy Center here in Pontiac, and to have one of our members, Gwen Edwards, providing leadership for this strategic ministry. We also have several members who helped start this ministry over 20 years ago and a number who volunteer right now. Would you please stand if you are, or have been, involved with the CPC? I'm delighted that we

support this ministry through our mission's budget.

4. The use of sonograms by Caring Pregnancy Centers.

This technology reveals the humanity of preborn children more graphically than ever. A 2005 survey by Care Net, a network of 1,000 Caring Pregnancy Centers, found that 72% of women who were "strongly leaning" toward abortion decided to carry their pregnancies to term after seeing a sonogram. One 16-year-old was shown a sonogram of her 21-week-old preborn and had this reaction: "As soon as I seen that, I was ready. It wasn't no joke. It was real. It was like, he's not born to the world yet, but he is inside me growing" (washingtonpost.com, 9/9/06). I would love to see our CPC here in Pontiac be able to add this tool so that a client could have a window into her womb. Perhaps God wants to use someone here today to make this a reality. I understand that a machine costs around \$50,000.

5. Parental involvement laws.

There are now 44 states that have either a parental notification or parental consent law. Yesterday's Pantagraph reported that Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan "asked a federal court Friday to allow enforcement of the state's long-dormant law requiring that parents be notified before a minor can obtain an abortion" (1/20/07).

6. Pro-life laws.

Mississippi has passed 15 pro-life laws in the past 13 years and as a result, abortions have decreased 60%.

7. Testimonies from those who've had abortions.

Carrie Earll, bioethics analyst for Focus on the Family, says, "It's not natural to kill our children, and all of us, women especially, know that intimately." And, now with increasing regularity, more and more women are coming forward to talk about their experience with abortion.

8. Media attention on the gruesome practices of partial-birth abortion.

This has caught the attention of the public, and people are repulsed by what they've learned.

9. The influence of Christians just like you.

This cannot be minimized as you interject God's views on life into conversations, and as you provide counsel to people who are in crisis. I applaud each you for your boldness on a controversial topic and as your pastors, we will do all we can to keep you encouraged and informed. For many in our country, the word "choice" has become an idol itself. It's time to reframe the question. The ultimate "choice" is this: Will you choose to serve the Lord and follow His Word?

It's interesting that when the people told Joshua that they were ready to serve the Lord, he essentially told them that they can't serve Him in verse 19: "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; He is a jealous God..." Perhaps they were being too flippant. Joshua didn't want them to sign up for religious reformation but instead was offering spiritual transformation. The choice to serve the Lord should not be made lightly...but it must be made.

I talked to someone this week who passed along something really helpful. When God asks for my whole life, I may feel like I can't do that. If God were to ask for a year, I might hesitate because I'm not sure I can follow through. A month? Still too long. How about a day? Maybe but I've never been able to do that. Here's something that we can all do: Surrender to God for the next 15 seconds. Everyone can do that. And then string a number of these 15-second increments together and you have a minute and then an hour and then a day and then a week and then a month and then a year and then a lifetime.

Life Responses

I can't tell you specifically how to respond to the issue of abortion, but I urge you to follow the Holy Spirit's nudges. We can't just sit back and do nothing. Proverbs 24:11 lays it out in pretty strong words: "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter."

Let me close this morning by listing some ways that you can get involved. It may be more comfortable to adopt a passive stance with regard to the abortion issue. It certainly would be the least offensive response. But who, with a clear conscience, can sit back, say little, and do nothing while babies continue to be killed? Choose today whom you will serve. We've looked at the final words of Joshua. He's urging us to choose the Lord. In some of Moses' last words, he urges us to choose life in Deuteronomy 30:19: "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

Here are some ways that you can choose life.

- If you're pregnant right now, see your preborn baby as part of your family. And then say like Joshua, "As for me and my family we will serve the Lord..."
- View yourself as a "survivor" of abortion. Everyone born after January 22, 1973 is a survivor. Historically, those who have endured an atrocity have always labored in earnest to end acts of violence.
- Volunteer at the Caring Pregnancy Center. Please stop by the display across from the Welcome Center and pick up some information.
- Support the CPC financially and with other gifts like diapers, formula, etc.
- Pass the word regarding our post-abortion Bible Study (see insert).

Studies show that the majority of women who've had abortions have significant emotional, physical and spiritual scars. The Elliot Institute in Springfield recently conducted a comprehensive survey of 260 post-abortive women. Not surprisingly, 92% of these women report that they have experienced feelings of guilt and 87% indicated that they suffered some depression (see the web site called, www.afterabortion.org for more information and additional resources). If you're ravaged by guilt right now, allow me to share something that a PBC member sent me this week. He was feeling bad for everything he has done and then he caught these words on the radio:

- I'm not what I could be.
- I'm not what I should be.
- I'm not what I will be.

But I'm not what I was because I'm a follower of Christ.

- Work with our children and student ministries.
- Seriously consider adoption.
- Become a foster parent.
- Write letters to your legislative representative.
- Offer to baby-sit for a single parent.
- Invite a pro-life speaker to your school.
- Be an extended family to a young woman in need.
- Talk to your children about sexual purity.
- Pray.

A Place of Grace

Brothers and sisters, I'm not really sure why we're so hard on people when they mess up, but we need to practice some grace. I've said it before and I'll say it again. Why do we get so angry with people who sin differently than we do? Some of us act like our sins smell better than the sins of others.

Abortion is wrong. It's repulsive and sinful. But, it's forgivable. While we need to speak out against moral concerns in our society, we must also offer love and compassion to those who need help. This is a place of grace. Jesus offers a fresh start and a new beginning. Some of His final words were these: "It is finished." That means the price has been paid. The debt is now cancelled. Don't be indecisive any longer. Get off the fence. Make your choice. Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. Choose the Lord and "choose life, so that your children may live."

10 Years Later

Almost exactly 10 years ago today, a nineteen-year-old college student was sitting right here in this room. She had just found out she was pregnant and had told her parents that weekend. Not really knowing what to do, the family came to church. She told me that she didn't want to attend that day because her whole life was in chaos. This young woman was seriously contemplating her options and was urged by her boyfriend to make a choice he thought would be the easiest.

As she sat through the service, Pastor Bob Wiedman got up and preached on the value and dignity of human life. As soon as she heard the Word preached she knew what she had to do. She took it as a sign from Him. God had already given her such a love for her baby and because she now knew what God wanted her to do; she gladly gave birth to her son. He is now nine-years-old and

was saved last year in AWANA and wants to be put on the list to be baptized this spring.

Before I introduce this mother and son to you, I just want to say that you may be in a similar spot right now. Or maybe you know someone who is, or will be. I urge you to make the right choice. Choose the Lord and choose life. I am very grateful for the obedience of Pastor Bob as he shared the truth of God's Word in that sermon. Incidentally, that particular year something had come up on the actual date for Sanctity of Life Sunday so they had to move it to the next weekend. That was all God's planning because this young woman was in church that Sunday and not the Sunday before.

I'd like to introduce them to you right now.

Video: "He Knows My Name."

Closing Song: "He Knows My Name."