

# ***Unstuck***

## **2. *When you hit a wall***

January 13-14, 2018

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Please turn to Joshua 5. This is the second week of our series *Unstuck*. The book of Joshua describes how the Jews got unstuck from 40 years in the desert and moved into the land God promised them. This book can teach us about how we can get unstuck and live out more of God's promises in our lives.

After 40 years in the desert, Joshua finally led God's people across the Jordan River and into the land that God had promised to give them. Immediately, however, they ran into a wall. Literally. The wall was the city of Jericho. Jericho had huge walls and the gates were locked tight with their army inside. The wall of Jericho was the obstacle standing between them and the land God promised them. It was preventing them from experiencing God's planned future.

You and I can hit walls, too. We can hear God's promise, get motivated to take a step, but then *wham*, we hit a wall. Our wall isn't a city called Jericho, it might be called: divorce or depression or loneliness. Maybe your wall is illness or opposition. We might wonder, "If God promised me joy and peace, why am I sick? Why did I lose my job? Why is my life going so badly if you promised to be with me always?"

A few weeks ago I heard that Doug Murren was in a coma fighting for his life. Doug Murren is one of the most innovative leaders in the American Church. He pioneered one of the first non-traditional mega-churches in the country, at one point baptizing 40-60 people per weekend. He has had a huge impact on churches around the world, including Crossroads. Last year I flew to Florida to spend the day in a Cracker Barrel restaurant to talk with him about what he is learning.

Doug has huge vision. He is starting a network of innovative churches and consulting with several denominations. But, a few months ago, hurricane Irma hit their newly-purchased house and made it unlivable, so they relocated to the Northwest, where Doug is from. Then a few weeks ago, out of the blue, Doug was hit with an infection that affected his organs and caused a cardiac arrest. He went into coma and was put on a respirator.

I know that a few years ago, some people gave Doug prophetic words from God that he was to move to Florida and pursue the work he is doing. Yet, as he is doing that, he loses his house and lands in a coma. He pursued the promise and hit a wall.

Maybe you've pursued God's promise, but hit a wall. When we hit a wall, it looks impossible. Overwhelming. No way around it, no way through it. Yet, at that

moment, God has something to say to you in the book of Joshua. The walls of Jericho looked impossible to the Jews. You can still see remnants of Jericho today. In fact, if you come with me to Israel in April, you will see it!

Jericho's walls were in stages. The first had a retaining wall that was 12-15 feet high. On top of that was a mudbrick wall about 20-26 feet high and 6 feet thick! At the top of the embankment was another mudbrick wall that was roughly 46 feet above the ground. That is what loomed high above the Israelites. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for the Israelites to penetrate the fortress of Jericho.

The Israelites might have wanted to ask, "God, if you have given us this land, why is there this walled city filled with people who want to kill us? If you promised us this land, why is this walled city in the way?" But God knew that Jericho was there when he commanded Joshua to lead the people into the land. It was not a surprise to him.

The problem that you face is not a surprise to him either. We may not know *why* we hit the wall, but here's what the Bible tells us: As we face our Jericho wall, God will show us that he keeps his promises and uses the wall to shape us to be his people.

God used the experience of facing Jericho to shape the Jewish people. They would be different after Jericho than they were before it. At Jericho, Joshua and the people of God faced: a city of pagan unbelief, a city of strategic importance and a city of human impossibility.

The Jews needed to face and conquer all three of these. They needed to confront the pagan unbelief head on because the land was filled with it. The corrupt Canaanite religion included barbaric practices and immorality. The Jews had to confront and defeat it or it would always influence them. The city was in a place of military importance. It had to be completely defeated or the Jews would never be safe. Because the walls were so high and protected, they looked impossible to defeat.<sup>1</sup>

When we face obstacles to God's promises, we will also have to face down unbelief and the problems may look impossible. **Joshua 5-6** gives us guidance on how to deal with the obstacles in our lives, the Jerichos which threaten to keep us stuck with less than God promised.

**When we hit a wall Look up. Joshua 5:13-15** *Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.* Joshua could have been fixated on the wall, but verse 13 says he *looked up* and saw a man standing with a drawn sword. The next verse tells

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/why-jericho-fell/>

us this was not an ordinary man, this was an angel from God. Joshua was no longer staring at Jericho's walls, he was having a spiritual encounter.

When we are facing an impossible obstacle, it is easy to get fixated on it, to obsess about it, to worry about it, study it, and look at it from all angles. But if we're going to get unstuck, then, at some point we need to look up. To remind ourselves of the reality that God is in this.

Some of the ways we can look up are to, first, worship weekly. When we worship and lift our eyes up to him and praise him, then God can tell us, "As you face your problem, rest assured that I'm here too!" Secondly, reading the scripture reminds us of the reality of God's presence. There are literally thousands of promises from God in the Bible. And thirdly, prayer helps us look up beyond our walls. If you can worry, you can meditate.

After we look up, **submit to God.** *Joshua 5<sup>13</sup> Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"<sup>14</sup> "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"<sup>15</sup> The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.* The angel says he's not a soldier for either side, he represents God. Joshua realizes that he asked the wrong question. The question is not, "Is this guy to fight on my side or the other side?" The correct question is, "Will I be on God's side?"

Often, when I am facing a wall or impossible situation, I start telling God how to fix it. In prayer I will say, "God, please do this, please make that to happen..." Now, there is nothing wrong with praying specifically. In fact, not much happens if we don't. But before I pray specifically about the problem, I first submit myself to him as the Lord to tell him that I am ready to pursue his purposes. I need to tell him that no matter what happens, I am his. I need to ask God what he wants to do.

We can't control whether or not we will hit a wall. We don't have it in our power to take the wall down. The only thing we can really control is our heart and how we respond to God. When we say "I am yours," we set ourselves up to experience his power, no matter what happens.

**Listen to God.** After Joshua's encounter with the angel, he returned to the wall where he heard two things from God. First, a promise. *Joshua 6:2<sup>2</sup> Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and it's fighting men.* Hundreds of years before this, God promised Abraham, "I will give your descendants the land." Later, God repeated that promise to both Moses and Joshua, "I'll give you the land." That's the big-picture, long-term promise. But now God gives Joshua a specific promise for that

moment, “I have delivered Jericho into your hands...” The first promise was the general one, “I’ll give you the land.” This promise is here for the immediate situation, “I have delivered Jericho...” It deals with what is in front of Joshua at that very moment.

We need both long-term and immediate promises. The Bible gives us many big-picture promises. When we are facing an impossible wall, there are the moments when we need a promise from God that applies to what is in front of us that day. If we listen, we will often hear it. It comes in different ways.

For example, let’s say we are facing the need for a job. We can read in the Bible that God promises to provide all we need in Christ Jesus. That’s a good promise and as we listen to the Lord that day, we might get a strong settled feeling of peace as we think about a particular interview, or assurance that all will be well. That’s the specific promise for the day.

The key is to pray, seek God, and get quiet in our spirit. God can speak to us anywhere, but if we are inviting him to speak, it is best to get alone, read the Bible, then get quiet and listen. We may hear a promise for that day.

Second Joshua heard from God a direction. When Joshua listened to God, he also got instructions on how to deal with the walls in front of him.

**Joshua 6:3-5** <sup>3</sup> *March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days.* <sup>4</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> *When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”*

This was an unusual strategy. There was a protocol for how armies would normally attack a fortified city, and this wasn’t it. Normally, an army would surround the city and then wait for the people inside to run out of food or water. It might take months or years before they weakened enough to be conquered. The Jews probably did not have enough men to surround the city, and they certainly did not have years to wait to conquer the place. So God gave him a different plan, one that would display God’s power to both the Jews and the Canaanites.

They were going to march around the city silently for six days in a row. The ark and the priests were to be in front. The ark was not a boat, this was a different kind of ark. It was what you see in the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The ark was a special box that had overlays of gold and two angels on top. Priests carried it by two poles. It held special items like the tablets with the Ten Commandments and Aaron’s staff. (Unfortunately it is lost to history - that’s why it’s the lost ark). The ark was where the presence of God was focused, and so when God said that the ark was to go first, he was saying to Joshua, “I will go before you and I am with you in this battle.” Earlier, God promised Joshua, “I will

be with you wherever you go.” The ark in front represented that reality. And Jesus promised you and me that he would never leave or forsake us, either!

God gave other specific directions to the people that included when to sound the trumpets, when to stay silent, when to shout. God gave direction when Joshua listened.

God gives direction today, too. Sometimes it is unconventional. When our church was new and we were trying to build our first building, we hit an impossible wall. We couldn't get a construction loan, so we couldn't hire a General Contractor to build. We prayed about that for months. Finally, one of our members said, “Why don't we build it ourselves without a general contractor? We can use volunteer labor.” Well, it's one thing to build a deck with volunteers, it's another thing to construct a public building and a public street with volunteers. But the more we looked into it, the more we saw how it could work. And it did.

After you submit yourself to God, listen for his direction. He will have a next step for you. It might be “wait”, or it might be “move”, but he will direct you to what you should do.

**Trust enough to obey.** In **Joshua 6:2**, God told Joshua “*I have delivered Jericho into your hand.*” Notice that God spoke in the past tense saying that it was as good as done. God had decided, and it would happen. Did the people believe that? The wall is still high, and the Canaanites were still inside! But Joshua commanded them to march, and they believed enough to obey God's direction and start marching. Verse 8 says that Joshua told the priest and the leaders the plan and then they moved out and did it. That's what faith does, it obeys God. As we turn to God and hear his direction, whether general or specific, it is vital to follow through and obey.

First, the Jewish people did what God said to do **promptly**. Not only did the people immediately do what Joshua said the first day, they woke up and did it again the next day! Verse 12 tells us, <sup>12</sup>*Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the LORD.* It was their priority, first thing every day, to do what God said to do. They made quite a sight marching around without speaking and the only sound was the horns. One of the ways we teach prompt obedience to God is through the *Ten-second rule*: that is, as soon as you are *reasonably* sure (we're never totally sure), that God wants you to do something, make a commitment to do it with in ten seconds. In other words, to see God's power, obey promptly.

Second, the Jewish people did what God said to do **persistently**. Great accomplishments require persistent effort, don't they? For example, if you are trying to lose weight, it takes more than eating right for one day. I laughed when I saw a meme that said, “This is what you feel like when you eat healthy for one day and still weight the same.” Overcoming the impossible takes follow through.

It's not enough to obey God for one day and then do whatever we want. We've got to be persistent in doing what God tells us to do.

The Jews marched for six days and saw nothing happen. You've got to figure that there were some little kids asking their parents, "Why are we walking around this city? I'm tired, I don't want to do this." There were probably some teen-agers walking ten steps behind their parents saying, "This is so lame. When will this be over?" And, some adults thinking, "I feel really stupid marching around in silence with all the Canaanites looking over their walls at us." But they did it. They persisted.

Finally, on the seventh day, they circled the city, and just as God said to do, they shouted... **Verse 20:** *When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.* This was Victory! The impossible had happened! God gave them the city just as he promised!

What if they had marched for only four days and quit? Or five? It took seven to fulfill what God told them to do. They obeyed, and God's power was unleashed. Don't stop short of God's miracle for your life. Some of us are just a few acts of obedience away from a breakthrough. Don't give up!

No one would mistake who knocked the wall down. It was God's power at work, but the people played a part. If they had not done what God said, the wall would not have come down. Just like when we built our building, it looked impossible for a long time. God made a way, but we had to give and work.

When it comes to doing the impossible, **without God we can't and without us God won't.** We obey and God provides the power. That way the end result was **Joshua 6:27** *So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.* Both God and Joshua became famous! When we pursue God's promises, we will hit walls, but God has a way of doing the impossible.

Just a few days ago Doug Murren confounded the doctors by opening his eyes. He is out of the coma. They wanted to keep him on the respirator for a while longer, but he doesn't need it. He is breathing on his own and responding to questions. He is on the way back. Thousands of people have prayed, and now Jericho walls are falling for Doug.

If you are facing an impossible wall today, know this: God's power is enough. In God's economy, **the three stages of overcoming are: impossible, difficult, and done.** If you have an impossible situation in front of you, realize that nothing is impossible with God.