

# Finishing Well

Lesson #36

Defeated By The Flesh

Nov. 2, 2022

The distance between a great victory followed by a great defeat is one step.

Joshua 1-6 Great victories under Joshua's leadership

The Israelites have been completely victorious in crossing the Jordan, entering the land, dealing with God at Gilgal & Jericho.

Joshua 7 But...Israel suffers a major defeat and is in full retreat.

Joshua is on his face in the dirt before God and filled with dismay.

Problem: Joshua & Israelites underestimated the strength of Ai, the flesh.

McGee: There are 3 "musts" that must be in our experience if we are going to lay hold of the spiritual blessings and gain victory over the flesh.

1. There must be a recognition of the enemy and his potential.
2. There must be an examination of the reasons for defeat by the enemy.
3. We must look carefully at the resources provided by God with which we can overcome the enemy.

## *Sin In The Camp*

Joshua 7:1-2a But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing:

- Trespass = a false step; implies a falling away after being close beside.

It is a tripping up, a deviation of course, a stumble away from the truth, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing; and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel. And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east of Bethel,

- Ai represents our flesh. Ai was located up among the hills, 13 miles north and west of Jericho, which was down on a plain. From the plains of Jericho up to the promontory of Ai one had to ascend 3200 feet over rugged and difficult terrain.

1. Recognition of the enemy and his potential

Joshua 7:2b-3 and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. <sup>3</sup> And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labor thither; for they are but few.

Problem: False estimation of the enemy! They were "basking in the warm sunlight of the first flush of victory. They were dreaming they had overcome Jericho.

But they forgot: they did not fight at Jericho. The victory was not theirs - it was all God's. They got possession, but God had given them the victory." [J. Vernon McGee]

Key Point: Relying on their past victory instead of the Lord caused them to be overconfident in their own ability. They could easily go up against such a small city when compared to Jericho.

Result of their underestimation of the enemy:

Joshua 7:4-5a So about 3,000 men from the people went up there, but they fled from the men of Ai. <sup>5</sup> And the men of Ai struck down about 36 of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck [smote] them down on the descent:

Note: The defeat of Israel's army at Ai is the only defeat recorded in Joshua and the only report of Jews slain in battle. Ai represents our flesh; our sin nature.

Truth: Our enemy defeats us in the same way.

We fail to recognize him. We fail to give our flesh credit for the potential it has.

Joshua 7:5b Wherefore, the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

- The defeat at Ai demoralized the people.

The defeat created misgivings and a lack of confidence in the Lord.

- Rather than examine their own lives as the source of their defeat, they began to doubt the Lord and wonder if He had changed His mind or if they had misread His directions.

Consider: We are so quick to become depressed, discouraged, and disoriented.

- We look in every direction for a reason for defeat—except to ourselves.
- We so often fail to honestly examine our own lives.
- We assume the problem could not possibly be us ... could it?

Key Point: My flesh is my worst enemy and my greatest handicap in my daily Christian walk.

Two factors make dealing with this enemy extremely difficult.

1. We are reluctant to recognize and identify him. We hate to label him as an enemy.
2. He is on the inside of us. He can fight better from his position within us.

Our enemy: The Flesh = sarx in the NT = used ~393x > used in one or two connections

1. Used to speak of the physical flesh > always carries a note of weakness

Isaiah 40:6 All flesh is grass...

Ps. 78:39 For He remembered that they were but flesh, [weak human beings]

2. Most of the time, sarx is used in a moral and ethical sense.

❖ Speaks of our old Adamic nature; the carnal or old man = the Flesh

Recognize our enemy, our Flesh > It is evil by nature.

❖ Am I inclined to sin? Sin is the old nature in rebellion against God. [Billy Graham]

What are the works of the flesh? Galatians 5:19-21: This is what the flesh is capable of:

❖ "...adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings..."

Rom. 7:18, 25 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing:

for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not.

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I of myself with the mind, indeed, serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Rom. 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight:

for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Rom. 8:7-8 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

I Cor. 1:29 That no flesh should glory before God.

Key Points: 1. Our flesh is warlike.

2. Our flesh was not a problem before we were redeemed because IT WAS BOSS.

3. Our flesh lusts or wars against our spirit after we are born again.

4. Our flesh is a hindrance to a successful Christian walk and growth in Christ.

Count de Maistre of France, a wonderful child of God and known in that country as one of its greatest Christians, left us this statement: "I do not know what the heart of a villain might be, I only know the heart of a virtuous man, and that is frightful."

Am I willing to admit that I have that kind of nature? Am I willing to admit that my old nature has the potential to absolutely wreck my Christian life and destroy me?

Truth: Until you are willing to admit this, you cannot go out to battle, for you will meet with defeat as did Joshua at Ai.

#### *Joshua's Reaction To Defeat: Joshua 7:6-9*

Josh. 7:6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads.

McGee: Joshua was stunned by the defeat and catastrophe at Ai. His actions and those of the elders were in keeping with the Hebrew practices of mourning and despair.

Prostrating himself before the Ark of the Lord certainly suggests that he and the elders were humbling themselves before the Lord. They were showing a deep concern and their need of God's hand; they needed His intervention and wisdom.

However, intermingled with these feelings, there is evidence of some self-pity and doubt.

We do have ways of showing our pain and doubt. We may fall on our knees or put our face in our hands and sob, but if there are feelings of self-pity and depression, we may become inactive or sullen. But these responses do not remove the pain nor do they solve the problem and enable us to grow through the experience.

After a whole day on his face, Joshua verbalized his perplexity in 3 questions and 2 statements. He didn't take it out on others, nor did he try to escape or repress it. He took it to the Lord.

Question #1: "Alas, O Lord God, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?"

➤ Alas = strong interjection of despair; points to a mood of hopelessness and defeat.

Alas, O LORD God acknowledges God's sovereign authority and Lordship over their lives.

But with the very next breath he seems to question God's purposes and promises as the Sovereign Lord.

- Why did You ever bring this people across the Jordan?
- He was acting as though God were not in control or as though God had merely tricked them.

Consider: Focusing on the problem negatively affects our view of God which in turn affects our faith in His purposes, plan, and promises.

A wrong focus, on the one hand, often turns mountains into mole hills. Perhaps, trusting in their past victory instead of the Lord, they had their eyes on the smallness of Ai and saw it as just a little problem. On the other hand, with their eyes on the defeat, they turned this mole hill into a mountain that was too big for the Sovereign Lord to handle.

It seems it never entered Joshua's mind that God may have had a reason for allowing the defeat or that they might in some way be the cause.

When our focus is wrong, we either forget God's promises or we question them.

Then we quit relating to God's person in all His divine essence.

In such a condition we no longer see the Lord as our hope, instead He becomes the villain.

Statement #1: Josh. 7:7b Would to God we had been content and dwelt on the other side Jordan!

How narrow our vision grows and how negative we become to God's purposes when we have our eyes on the circumstances and lose sight of the Lord! We go into reverse and look back.

The tendency is to become nostalgic for the 'good old days.' We become like Israel who remembered the garlic, leeks and cucumbers, but forgot about the taskmasters and mud pits. To be comfortable, we are willing to settle for a life of mediocrity rather than learn what the hindrances are so that we can move ahead in the pursuit of excellence.

Their assumption: Since they had been defeated, they could not go forward.

It would have been better not to have encountered the enemy.

Their perspective: Their failure had somehow weakened God's ability to give them future victories. God is never limited by our defeats. As the Sovereign Lord, He is able to work all things together for good, the good of conforming us like His Son [Rom. 8:28-29].

Question #2: Josh. 7:8 "O Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies?" Remember Joshua 6:27 after the defeat of Jericho:

- "So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land."

Now it seems Joshua was worried about the complaints of the people and their willingness to follow his leadership. Will this failure preempt my ability to do what you have called me to do because of their attitudes and questions? Furthermore, people would want some answers and he simply didn't have any. What could he possibly say to them?

Perhaps he was feeling personal blame for the way the men had turned and fled.

Would people blame him for the defeat?

Was he concerned about the impact of all this on his ability to lead the people?

Statement #2 and Worry: Josh. 7:9 "For the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and they will surround us and cut off our name ..." Joshua was concerned about the impact of this defeat on their testimony to the nations and how it could bring them down in a concerted effort against God's people.

Would this provide a beachhead for the enemy to now go on the offensive and attack Israel rather than vice versa? The world is watching us and the way we handle our problems affects the attitude of the world toward the Christian community [I Pet. 3:13-17].

Joshua may have been guilty of thinking that one failure must lead to other failures.

- Victory is less likely now because they had so miserably failed.

True, our sin and failure may affect our testimony for a while.

But God is always able to work all things together for good for those who love Him.

Question #3: "And what will You do for Your great name?"

It appears that Joshua's greatest concern was the news of this defeat might somehow reduce the respect of the heathen nations for God's own name.

Ironside: Two things troubled him: The story of their defeat at Ai would spread rapidly throughout the land. The other nations of Canaan would be encouraged to defend their cities with renewed valor, whereas before the fear of the Lord had fallen upon them.

Jehovah can defend His own name. He will not condone sin in His own people to do this.

Sin must be dealt with before God will manifest Himself openly on their behalf.

#### *Reasons For Defeat*

1. Depended on their own ability and resources
  - Actually, they were no match for the men of Ai who were smarter and stronger.
  - The Israelites could never have overcome Ai in their own strength.
  - It is a losing struggle if we depend on our own strength and resources.

Ironside: The Fall of Jericho: Such a miraculous way, without any real effort on Israel's part, evidently led to overconfidence and forgetfulness.

It was God alone who had destroyed this first barrier to their possession of the land.

The next city, Ai, to be subdued was small compared to Jericho and a detachment sent out to reconnoiter reported that it would be easily captured and that it would be quite unnecessary for the entire host to move against it.

- So Joshua sent about 3,000 men to destroy Ai, but were defeated ignominiously.
- They fled before the men of Ai and thirty-six of them were slain.
- It was a great shock naturally to Joshua and to the people as a whole.

## *Reasons For Defeat*

### 2. Did Not Recognize Their Own Weaknesses

No doubt Joshua was eager to move forward for the Lord and to take more territory in keeping with God's directions and His purpose for Israel.

- Joshua was obviously a little self-confident and resting too much on the victory at Jericho.
- Joshua evidently failed to take time to get alone with the Lord to inquire of Him and seek His strength. If he had, he would not have remained ignorant of the sin of Achan which needed to be dealt with first. Result: Fight Ai twice

Four deadly errors were the result:

- They remained ignorant of the sin of Achan.
- They underestimated the strength of the enemy.
- They over-estimated the strength of their own army.
- They presumed on the Lord—they took Him for granted.

Because of a workaholic mentality or an activity-oriented bent or a desire to get things done and to be successful, there is the tendency to rush off without taking time to draw near to the Lord, draw on His resources, and to put on the full armor of God.

Result: This causes us to be insensitive to serious failures in our own lives and ministries which grieve and quench the Spirit and leave us defenseless against the enemy because we are operating in our own strength and wisdom.

Truth: Ultimately, these failures stand in the way of our progress and ability to handle the various challenges in life.

## *Reasons For Defeat*

### 3. Sin in their own camp,

McGee: Joshua went before the LORD and stayed there all day. He wept bitterly and sobbed and put on sackcloth and ashes. Finally, after bearing with this, the LORD grew weary of it.

Joshua 7:10 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel has sinned...

Redpath: God is saying: In view of who I am, in view of My plan for Israel and My promises to you, Joshua, what possible reason could you have for such despair?

McGee: "Cut out this whining and fretting before Me."

This command calls for Joshua to rise up from his state of despair and futility, which has neutralized him, in order to prepare himself for action, listen to the Lord, take up his responsibility and lead the people in God's deliverance.

In preparation for his ministry of leadership, Joshua is again told to "rise up." He can't lead the people with his face in the dirt or while moping about, depressed over the defeat.

- This is in essence a call for restoration to fellowship and faith in the power of God.

Jesus warned Peter: Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift you *men* like wheat; <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail; and you, when you have turned back [restoration to fellowship], strengthen your brothers." Peter was not to allow his failure and denials to neutralize him or keep him from being a leader and ministering to others. After being restored to fellowship, Peter exhorts us: I Pet. 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

McGee: Perhaps you have wearied the Lord in some way. There are many times when prayer is of no avail. You are just wasting your time.

How many times have you and I gone to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have You let this thing happen to me?" We have remained before Him blubbing like a baby yet knowing all the time that there was something in our lives with which we were refusing to deal.

God is saying to us through His words to Joshua, "Get up off your knees and get up on your feet. I do not want to hear you until you deal with that thing in your life."

Lesson: While the Lord understands and sympathizes with our problems and fears, and while humbling ourselves before the Lord is always needed, He nevertheless never condones our being prostrate in despair nor excuses us from appropriating His grace and moving out in obedience. His Word to us is get up off our face, get our eyes on Him and deal with our problems according to the principles and promises of Scripture. This is a call for decisive action that is willing to make tough decisions to deal with our sin. Feeling sorry and sad about our condition is not enough. We must be willing to deal decisively with our sins.

Prov. 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

McGee: Nothing is ever accomplished with our face in the dirt or with our eyes on our failures and problems. First, we must confess our failures and the things that caused them when they can be determined. Then we must seek to learn from them. Finally, we need to know that God's will is immediate recovery and faith in the grace of God. God's will: Get up and move on.

Keathley: God's people, including the great heroes of the faith, are pictured with blemishes, warts and all. God does not touch up the photo. Rather, He shows us their humanness to comfort us in our own failures and to challenge us to realize He can use us greatly if we will but trust Him. Failure is unique to none of us ... and it is not the end.

In fact, it can be the beginning depending on how we respond.

When we keep making the same mistakes our defeats have no life-changing value.

Keathley: A study of Bible characters reveals: Most of those who made history were men who failed at some point, and some of them drastically, but who refused to continue lying in the dust. Their very failure and repentance secured for them a more ample conception of the grace of God. They learned to know Him as the God of the second chance to His children who had failed Him—and the third chance, too ...

Truth: There is no such thing as a perfect or infallible leader.

The successful leader is a man who has learned: No failure needs to be final and acts on that belief, whether the failure is his own or that of another.

He must learn to be realistic and prepared to realize that he cannot be right all the time.

### *Reasons For Defeat*

#### 4. Not using the tactics and resources God provides

We must acknowledge the fact: There is a war to be fought.

Gal. 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would.

- Immature believers are no match for the vicious attacks of the flesh.

Key Point: Our spiritual struggle with the sin nature, inherited from Adam, is an ugly monster on the inside which despises the things of God and wants to sin by pleasing self.

When the Holy Spirit makes gains over sin in our lives, the sin nature puts up a fierce struggle to take that territory back. It often attacks us from the rear in a surprise attack.

- There is IMMEDIATE resistance from the FLESH. Attacks & war commence!

Just when we think we have lust, temper, laziness, pride, or any other sin licked, it raises its ugly head in our lives, and we realize again we are in a struggle with sin until we die.

McGee: Today many Christians are marching around Jericho, blowing trumpets and talking about how "separated" they are. At the same time, they are suffering a glaring defeat at Ai because the flesh is overcoming them.

Someone says: "I am a separated Christian." What do you mean by that?

Person #1: "Well, in my business I have to go to many parties where they serve cocktails.

I always turn my glass down. I have never tasted a cocktail."

McGee's reply: I am glad for that testimony. But are you continually filled with the Holy Spirit?

Eph. 5:18 "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit"

Do you have the Holy Spirit fulfilling in your life all the wonderful things that God wants done?

Is the fruit of the Spirit being produced in you? No? Then you are defeated at Ai.



Person #2: "I am a separated Christian. I do not smoke cigarettes.

McGee's Reply: Certainly, I want to congratulate you.

Question: Which is worse, to have fire on the end of a cigarette or the fire of jealousy and envy on the end of your tongue?

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

In The Saving Life of Christ, Ian Thomas writes 'There are countless Christians fighting a battle that is already lost, trying in their own strength to overcome the subtleties of sin. That is a battle you can fight all your days, but I tell you now, you can never win! It is a battle already lost, lost in the first Adam... Victory over the flesh is not attained but received.

Gal. 5:16 "Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh"

Now the devil loves to invert truth and turn it into a lie, and probably what he has been saying to you is this: "Try not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, and then you will walk in the Spirit" as though the latter was a reward for the former. He knows that in this way, he will keep you preoccupied with yourself, instead of being preoccupied with Christ. There is nothing quite so nauseating or pathetic as the flesh trying to be holy!... Is that what you have been trying to do? You have been trying not to fulfil the lust of the flesh, in order to walk in the Spirit - fighting a battle already lost.

Much of God's preparation in our lives consists of setting up this struggle so we will see self [flesh; sin nature] for what it is and then attempt to get free from its evil power and influence. There is no hope of consistent abiding in the Lord Jesus as long as we are under the dominion of our flesh, in which "dwells no good thing." [Rom. 7:18]

McGee: My friend, your worst enemy is your old nature.

You cannot whip the "bully" who lives within you. He is whipping you, isn't he?

You can keep on blowing trumpets around Jericho, but you are still in line for defeat at Ai.

Truth: God will not salvage the old nature. It cannot be remodeled for use by Him.

Since God will not use the old nature, it is necessary to have a new nature that comes from God. Your new nature desires to live the new life in Christ, but it does not have the power to. You must be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

After we are born again and filled with the Spirit [new nature], we begin, as new babes in Christ, to read our Bible, pray and start growing. The Word Of God and the power of The Holy Spirit work in us to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ.

II Pet. 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises:

that by these ye might be Partakers Of The Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Redpath: A life of unbroken victory over sin is the purpose of God for every child of His redeemed by the blood of Christ. The child of God who has pressed forward into the land of the abundant life and is claiming the victory that is his in Jesus Christ is in more acute danger of defeat than he who has not gone so far. The child of God who is determined to live his life in the center of the will of God ceases to live, as it were, in the shelter of the valley. He is exposed now; he is on higher ground, where the storms lash with all their fury. Because of his determination to be content with nothing less than Gods best, such a man of god is more than ever subject to the subtlety of the devil - a first class target for him.

Gal. 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. It is an attitude of total dependence upon Him, exposing everything to Him, "and you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh" -you will then be enjoying through Him the victory that Christ has already won.

Thomas: "The day will come when in clearer light, you will thank God for your necessities, and be of the same mind as the apostle Paul, who said, 'Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my infirmities, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me'; 'for when I am weak, then I am strong.' You will thank God your necessities were the platform for His providence to display its care upon, that the very wilderness was a blessing to you because He prepared a table for you in the midst of it, and might have left you to prepare one for yourself, if it had not been this desert place. As for the enemies which beset the children of Israel, they might almost be congratulated, for, fierce as they were, yet Israel could never have had victories if they had not known battles."

Spurgeon: I have learned to kiss the wave that slams me into the Rock of Ages.