



# BASIC TRAINING

*SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP*

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Joshua 1:1-9

Second Message

John Hanneman

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I don't like house painting. If I never touched another paintbrush in my life, that would be fine with me. I hate all the preparation that painting demands—stripping old wallpaper, filling holes, sanding, caulking, taping, moving furniture, laying out drop cloths, deciding on the right colors, shopping and cleaning up. But when the prep work is finished, and it has been done well, painting is a breeze.

Preparation is critical too when as Christians we enter the land and take on the enemies that lie in wait for us as we begin our walk of faith. Preparation for the battles ahead is time consuming and difficult, but it is of the utmost importance to final victory.

Last week when we began our study in Joshua, I challenged us to go to war against one or two strong enemies in our lives. But we must be warned: before we go off slaying dragons, we need to prepare for war. If we are not equipped with the right weapons we will be overmatched. In this book of Joshua, preparation for the battles to come is allotted much more space than the actual battles. So it should be with us. If we prepare ourselves through worship and focusing on God, we will find that the actual battle is not as foreboding as we imagined.

So today and next week we will be going to spiritual “boot camp” for basic training. But there will be no sit-ups, no push-ups and no running in this training camp. Instead, we will concentrate on learning about worship and theology. As we register for camp, we will have to be honest with ourselves, because we will be taking on our deepest fears. We will be learning truths that will help us prepare ourselves for war, truths that can become valuable arrows in our quiver as we engage in battle.

In the Exodus, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, but Israel failed to enter the promised land, wandering instead in the wilderness for forty years. Because he had disobeyed God, Moses himself was prevented from entering the land of Canaan. Following Moses' death, Joshua was named his successor; he would lead the people into the land. Joshua was commissioned for his role by Moses, by Eleazar, and by God himself.

In our last study we talked about Joshua's life and character from the Old Testament prior to the book of Joshua. Today we begin our text. The opening verses feature very important instructions that God gives to Joshua. Chapter 1, verses 1-9:

**Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory. No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. 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 success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:1-9, NASB).**

Today we will look at five essential truths from these verses. As we will see, the themes we encounter here will be repeated throughout our study of Joshua.

Notice, first, the promise: The land is *given* by God to his people. The word “give” occurs seven times in chapter 1, in verses 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 14, 15. (The same word occurs thirty times in the book of Deuteronomy.) The land, which has vast dimensions and boundaries, was promised repeatedly as an inheritance to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It cannot be taken through believers' own efforts. And it is not given as a reward; it is received only as a gift, and conquered in faith. Moses himself told the people, “Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people” (Deut. 9:6).

Entering into the land is accomplished by two crossings, both of which involve passing through water. The exodus from Egypt was accomplished by crossing the Red Sea; the conquest of Canaan was accomplished by crossing the Jordan. For Christians, the land is our life in Christ. The Spirit-filled life, the gift which was promised, is embraced solely by faith, not works. We don't

deserve this gift and we cannot earn it. We enter through the reality that water baptism represents. We leave Egypt, we are baptized into the death of Christ, we are separated from the world. We enter Canaan, we are baptized into the life of Christ, we become new creations. The place where God dwells, the place where we meet God, is in the land. This is confirmed in the New Testament, where Jesus is described as such a gift by the apostle Paul: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Why is it so important for us to prepare ourselves with this truth as we enter into battle? In the land we are entering into something that God has initiated, and we find there is something he wants us to do. He wants to give us the land. He wants us to enjoy our life in Christ. He wants to give us fruit that our hands have not worked for. He wants to bless us. This is the covenant that he wants to make with us. And not only that, when we enter the land we enter into a relationship with God that is based on gift and total acceptance. We don’t enter into the battle so that we can be in a right relationship with God. We enter into battle *because* we are in a right relationship with him.

This truth is primary, because it forms the basis for how we should relate to God. If we relate to him on any other basis, our preparation for battle will not be complete. In fact, this is how we should enter into any covenant relationship—on the basis of gift. Marriage is a covenant relationship. If we don’t see our spouse first and foremost as a gift, one to whom we commit loyal love and total acceptance, then the relationship will be skewed. So it is in our relationship with God. This truth forms the whole foundation for entering into our life in Christ.

So as we prepare for war the first thing to remember is that our life in Christ is the gift of God; it is not the result of our own efforts.

There is a second truth we need to know: In the land there will be opposition, but victory is guaranteed.

Even though the land is given to us as a gift, it must be taken in battle. The land must be walked on before it becomes ours. The soles of our feet have to tread on the places that God wants to give us. Therefore, we have to enter the battle. We have to fight. Victory is not automatic. But we can fight with confidence, remembering God’s promise to Joshua: “no man will be able to stand before you (to your face) all the days of your life” (v. 5).

Certainly Jesus possessed this sense of confidence when he faced his own torture and death. He knew that victory over Satan, death and darkness was guaranteed. Now we are in Christ and we are following him into battle. We too will face conflict, we will face enemies; there is nothing we can do to avoid them. But God

promises that we will be victorious. Victory may be in the future—it may not seem like victory at the moment—but ultimate victory is guaranteed for those who love God.

This is an essential truth, because it makes a big difference if you know who is going to win when you go out to war. Watching a video tape of a sporting event is very different if you already know who won the game. This is the kind of confidence we can have as we face the battle. “No man can stand before your face”—because you are in Christ.

Here is the third truth: The reason we will be victorious is because God promises to be with us.

That is what God says three times in this chapter, “I will be with you” (vv. 5, 9, 17). He qualifies this further by saying, “I will not fail or abandon you” (to let drop, to let alone). “I will not forsake or leave you” (forsake, depart, let loose) (Ps. 37:25, 33; Ps. 9:10).

This passage is very meaningful for me. A couple of years ago, a situation arose with my daughter when she was away at school that caused me great consternation and anxiety. I was very confused in how to respond. For several days I could not even talk to her. At the time I was studying the book of Joshua, and I came to this word, “I will not fail or abandon you.” I discovered that this means, “I won’t let you drop,” “I won’t let go of you.” God had given me my answer. I realized that God had never let go of me despite all my wanderings and all my mistakes. I thought to myself, if this is how God treats me, isn’t this how I should treat others, especially my own family? I telephoned my daughter that night and told her that although I was still angry about what had happened, I would not let go of her, I would not let her drop. When I shared this with her later, she told me the reason all this had happened was to strengthen my relationship with God! This situation has caused my own heart to be enlarged in its capacity to sense that God loved me, and it has caused me to feel unlimited affections for my daughter just for who she is and not for what she does. The affections that we have shared since that day have made the battle well worth while.

This is the great assurance of Scripture: God with us—Emmanuel. This was the promise God gave to Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Israel, the Servant in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul. It is the last word which Jesus gave to his disciples: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

God does not go on vacation. When we come to him he doesn’t say to us, “Can’t you see I’m busy?” He never lets us go it alone; he does not let go of us. His loyalty never ends. That is one of his covenant promises. We can take on many foes and encounter many battles if we know that God is with us, for, as Paul pointed out, “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). The thing that discourages and defeats us is the feeling that we are all alone. This was what so pained our Lord when he was languishing on the cross. This was why he

cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Then, Jesus was separated for the first time from the Father. He could endure the physical pain; it was the separation that caused the deepest wounds. Because of what Jesus endured, God is always with us.

I discovered the truth of this years ago on a Sunday morning when I had to preach in a church in Singapore. Our pastoral staff was visiting countries in the Far East to hold pastors’ conferences, and I was a new staff member. It was arranged for us that we would speak in several churches one Sunday morning, and I ended up speaking at a large church. This preaching business was all new to me and I was very fearful. Not only did I have to preach before a large congregation, but I had to do so through an interpreter. As I awaited my turn to preach, I began to pray. When I looked over the congregation I sensed the presence of God and I felt a great sense of peace. I got so carried away that the pastor had to pass me a note telling me it was time to stop speaking!

No matter what our circumstances, God promises to be with us.

The fourth truth is this: The main encouragement in the land is to be strong and bold.

Four times Joshua is encouraged along these lines. Moses encouraged him thus: “Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. And the LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear, or be dismayed’” (Deut. 31:7-8). The Lord himself commissioned Joshua at the tent of meeting in the presence of Moses and said to him: “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you” (Deut. 31:23). The Lord now encourages Joshua after Moses has died. The words “strong” and “bold” occur three times in Judges 1:6, 7, 9. Also, the two and half tribes that settled beyond the Jordan give Joshua the same encouragement (Judg 1:18).

The words convey parallel ideas, both of which speak of strength. To be strong might be paraphrased, “be a man.” The opposite of being strong and bold is to be fearful and dismayed. Thus God adds the prohibitions, “do not fear” and “do not be dismayed.” The word “fear” here is a very strong term. It means to be so terrified that we tremble. “Dismayed” speaks of brokenness. The word is used of leaders whose courage has been shattered, people who are demoralized and panic-stricken. The assumption is that the only way we are thwarted from taking possession of the land is by our own fear and unbelief. The only way we can be defeated is if we don’t show up. And yet, this very thing, fear, may be the most difficult element for us to conquer.

When Israel went out to battle, Moses instructed the

priest to come near and speak to the people: “Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deut. 20:3-4).

This is a great word for our day, especially for men. We are surrounded by evil and darkness. The danger we face is relentless. It is projected on our television screens; it shouts at us from our computer monitors. At times, sin has such a tight hold on us we feel incapable of defeating its powerful influences. These enemies terrorize, crush and break us. They keep us from taking possession of our life in Christ, the land that God has given to us.

Oftentimes the sin that we struggle with is symptomatic of something that is going on beneath the surface. Our sin tells us that we are not coping with our fears, or that we are trying to relieve the aches and pains of a lonely heart. It takes a great deal of courage to face these deeply entrenched enemies.

Larry Crabb, in his book, *The Silence of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), describes some of the deep fears that men face:

Men who feel powerless like things predictable. They don’t enjoy surprises. The unexpected is a thrilling adventure only when it occurs in areas where an unmanly man feels specially competent...But beneath the confidence of the most gifted man is a fear that won’t diminish. Unmanly men are haunted by the possibility of something happening that they cannot handle, something that requires them to enter unfamiliar territory where their adequacy remains unproven, where their proven talents may be useless. Every honest man feels that fear. An unmanly man feels nothing more strongly than that fear but denies how strong it is within him (p. 44).

What if life exposes me as a failure, someone who cannot handle its legitimate demands? What if I am unable to deal effectively with matters that I must admit are truly important? What if I ruin everything—my family, my friendships, my job—and I am left alone, a loser standing naked for everyone to see? What if I face the fact that all my money, possessions, and good times haven’t filled that awful emptiness deep inside? Unmanly men live with a quiet terror that, like high blood pressure, slowly and silently kills. The terror won’t go away. Usually it remains hidden under the wraps of success, sociability, and routine. Sometimes it erupts. And when it erupts, unmanly men panic or get depressed; sometimes they fell the urge to commit suicide, to kill someone else, or to enjoy the unique pleasures of immorality (p. 47).

Over the years I have seen how needy I am in this area. I become fearful when things get out my control, when something happens to one of my children, when I don’t feel adequate to do what I should. I am afraid to relinquish control or to confront someone with truth. But it is just as fearful to me to tell a parent, a spouse, a daughter or a son that I love them. For years I thought

my problem was low-self esteem. It turns out, however, I am arrogant; I just lack courage.

It takes courage to be honest with our fears and our sense of inadequacy. It takes courage to face an addiction and the reasons behind it. It takes courage to deal with painful resentment in marriage. It takes courage to tell your children that you love them no matter what grade they bring home on their report card. And God tells us be strong and be courageous. But we don't have to do so in our own strength. As Paul writes in Ephesians, we are to "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might" (Eph 6:10). God is with us, therefore we can be strong and courageous.

Four times in the text God repeats this word of encouragement to Joshua after Moses and the Lord had given him the same word in Deuteronomy. Joshua had already walked with God for seventy years. He had served Moses. He had observed everything that God had done in delivering Israel from Egypt and providing for them in the wilderness. Perhaps Joshua was just like us. Despite all the past victories and the successes he would have in the future, he needed daily encouragement to be strong in the Lord.

We need to arm ourselves with courage as we go to war. God will do the rest.

Here is the final thing we need to know: The main exhortation in the land is to make God's word central in our lives

In verses 5-9 we see repeated the themes we have been talking about. They form an interesting pattern: God is with you; be strong and courageous; keep the law; be strong and courageous, God is with you. The center thought of these verses refers to God's word and its importance as we seek to defeat enemies and take possession of our life in Christ.

Several phrases here relate to God's word: "The law will not depart from your mouth"; we should "meditate on it day and night." These words refer to discipline. The thought here is to know, to study, to think about God's word continually, day and night. To "meditate" is a term that describes a low sound, like the moaning of a dove. In OT times, perhaps the Scripture was read in a low voice during meditation. We should read God's word, and we should speak it, too. If we know God's word, it will be on the tip of our tongue when we need wisdom to respond to a pressure-filled situation. Meditating on the words of God is in contrast to the wicked who meditate on plotting evil day and night.

The goal is to observe to do "according to all that has been written in the law"; "do not turn aside from it to the right or to the left." The thought here is obedience. Will we obey what God says? We don't obey in order to be legalistic or to earn God's approval. We obey because God is God and we are not, because as his people

we are in a covenant relationship with him.

The result of all this is that you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (1:8). "Prosperous" means to accomplish satisfactorily what is intended. "Success" is the thinking that results in wise dealing and use of practical common sense; to have insight or comprehension, wise behavior that conforms one's life to the character of God.

"Prosperity" here is not referring to money, fame or success. Oftentimes obedience to God's word leads to suffering. The promise is that if we obey God's ways we will have what we really want. We will be able to deal with life and we will find that God himself will meet our needs. The reason we don't obey God is because we really don't believe he will give us what we need to survive. Obedience comes out of trust, believing that God will provide for our every need in Christ Jesus. Here is how Psalm 1 describes the man who is blessed: "His delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers" (Psa 1:2-3).

Reading, speaking and obeying God's word is critical to possessing our life in Christ.

This then is how we begin to prepare our minds and hearts and souls for war. These are the truths we need to equip ourselves with. Life in Christ is a gift that God wants us to have. There will be obstacles which must be faced, but no enemy can stand before the Lord. Victory is guaranteed, so be strong and bold, and keep God's word central in your lives.

If we did nothing else other than come to church on Sunday, remind ourselves of these truths and re-center our thoughts, we would go out with renewed strength and hope and assurance. This is worship—filling our minds and hearts with the thoughts of God. We are engaging together as the people of God. We listen. We pray. We respond. This preparation through worship becomes critical for the battles we will face. May God allow each of us to be equipped with these wonderful truths today.

The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
Whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the defense of my life;  
Whom shall I dread?  
When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,  
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.  
Though a host encamp against me,  
My heart will not fear;  
Though war arise against me,  
In spite of this I shall be confident. (Psa 27:1-3)

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