



weekend

resource guide

for the week of 3 March

Now Jericho was tightly shut.. The LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand... You shall march around the city, all men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.... When you hear the sound of the trumpet all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat. (Joshua 6.1-5)

Intimidation is a powerful and unique fear... Powerful because it alone can cause us to sacrifice the opportunities of tomorrow for the status quo of yesterday. Intimidation browbeats us into deep feelings of inadequacy as our creativity, vision, and might wilt before it. Unique because intimidation is a fear that threatens our willingness to embrace God’s future for our lives. All intimidation has to do is recite reality because it wants to disqualify us because we are not perfect. Intimidation starts those old tapes playing: “you are neither smart enough or ingenious”... “you are not a great—or even a good—leader”... “you are ineffective and unfruitful”... “you have nothing in your past to suggest that you have it within you”... And on and on and on it goes... Intimidation goes so far as to use our heroes against us by reminding us that we can never be as good, effective, or fruitful as those we highly esteem or idolize.

God’s instructions to Joshua were not only for his battles—they are for our battles too! They do not reflect some kind of cute and novel whim on God’s part. God intended Joshua to overcome Jericho and to learn some principles that would empower him to live a faithful and fruitful life un-intimidated by what was before him. Loved ones, let us learn these three tactics well:

Walk around it... don’t talk about it
Sound your trumpet... don’t beat your drum
Shout... don’t mumble or whisper

Walk around it...don’t talk about it. There will always be incongruity between the overwhelming proportion of the obstacle faced and the simple strategy and small stature of the one God calls. Here is an essential lesson: when the odds are stacked against you don’t talk about them.

One of my most painful experiences as a pastor came several years ago when I was wrongfully accused by leaders within my denomination of usurping the call of an interim pastor to the church I was serving as an associate pastor. I was called before a disciplinary committee and heard all kinds of falsehoods and innuendo. The meeting concluded with the chair stating that there was no place for me within our denomination. My response was to keep silent. My silence paved the way for future leadership opportunities that would otherwise have remained impossible.

Through this I learned that the “strides of silence” have real impact:

Silence deflates the tyranny of the obstacle before you. Silence gained me a higher ground to see that the Lord had other issues and opportunities that He considered more important than what I would naturally have chosen to be preoccupied with.

Silence protects you from saying words that may come back to compromise you. We can neither understand the future nor completely perceive the motivations behind people’s actions in the present. Words reflect our human vantage-point. They underestimate God’s power and provision while they overstate the impassability of the obstacle before us. In my case, the disciplinary committee was acting on the falsehoods of one particular person. My silence kept me from uttering words I would later regret and paved the way for them to have the emotional freedom to apologize months later when the truth was made clear.

Silence fosters expectation and hope while it prepares you to see God’s hand working on your behalf. Silence forces your faith to be decisive—either you trust Him to lead, provide, and overcome or you do not. If you do be quiet and follow Him... if you don’t, then incessantly gossip, whine, complain, and vent. We all know how the latter alternative is effective for tearing down strongholds and overcoming opposition! (I trust you catch my sarcasm!)

... more on this next week. Until then, enjoy your LifeGroup!

Getting to know one another...

Did you ever run away from home? Where did you go, and what happened?

Reading Scripture together...

Matthew 6.12-15: The forgiveness we need and need to give...

and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

14 *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

What? (does the Bible say?)

What is forgiveness?

If Jesus' death covers our sin, what sin are we asking God to forgive and why?

NOTE: The original language of the Scriptures frequently introduces us to new understandings of passages we take for granted. Warning: Here begins a grammar lesson! Greek verbs have 3 parts: tense, voice, and mood. Here, the verb, "forgive" is an aorist active imperative. The tense is aorist— usually a definitive action in time whose duration is indefinite. The voice is active— the subject of the verb is to perform something or take specific action. Finally, the mood is imperative— a command is given. So when Jesus teaches us to pray: "Forgive us our sins" we could translate this phrase dynamically: "I command you to forgive us our sins today and everyday to come!" By the way, the same observation can be said of "give us this day our daily bread" and "lead us not into temptation". These are commands too.

Want do you think Jesus intended His followers to learn from this deliberate choice of language?

What does this encouragement to "command our Father to forgive" suggest about our relationship with God?

So what? (what difference does it make?)

How do you reconcile obedience and surrender to God's will and sovereignty with the imperative language of the Lord's prayer?

Why do you think Jesus chose to use the word "debt" and "trespass" rather than the word "sin"?

When you ask God to forgive you for a sin or failure in your life, are you confident of his cleansing or do you have doubts? Explain why you feel secure or insecure.

Christians believe that we receive forgiveness from God by grace alone. Why, in this request, does Jesus make it sound like our forgiveness of others is a condition for our forgiveness from God?

Who is the easiest person for you to forgive? Why?

Who is the hardest person for you to forgive? Why?

Now what? (how will I think?)

Jesus teaches us to pray: "Forgive us OUR debts". What sins might be ours to confess as a LifeGroup or a local congregation?

How does a LifeGroup or congregation receive forgiveness? How do we know when we are forgiven?

How can your LifeGroup be a more intentional "confessional community" in harmony with this prayer? How would you answer someone who interprets this passage to mean that God promises to give His children everything their hearts desire?

Prayer requests...

(write in advance what you want your group to pray for...)

Praying for my group...