



# Overcoming Fear

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## There are Giants in the Land

When the Israelites stood on the bank of the Jordan River, they knew that they had to face the Canaanites and defeat them if they were going to win the Promised Land for themselves. When the spies had first gone into Canaan, they had described the inhabitants as huge and strong ... veritable giants (Numbers 13:33).

In life, we face giants ... huge enemies committed to our destruction. Some of these giants are sin, discouragement, failure, despair, and doubt. We have to overcome these giants in order to live the victorious life God has promised us in Christ.

One of the giants we face – the giant we will look at in this lesson – is the giant of fear.

Now, there are many different kinds of fear, and it would be impossible to address them all in one lesson. Therefore, just as the Israelites on the banks of the Jordan were facing the fear of starting something new, that is where we want to focus our attention.

What might you be afraid of as you step into unfamiliar territory or try something new?

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Most likely, the same fears you listed above were fears the Israelites were experiencing as well. After all, they were facing a new land, enemies with swords, and stone city walls. They didn't have any knowledge about the land, they were heading into definite battles, and they could very easily be killed and their wives and children sold into slavery. Their fears were real, tangible, and understandable.

This lesson will focus on two of the biggest fears that arise when we are trying something new: the fear of the unknown, and the fear of failure.

## Fear of the Unknown

First, the fear of the unknown.

Think of a time when fear of the unknown kept you from moving forward into new territory, or tried to stop you from trying something new. What happened? What did you do? Looking back, is there anything you would do differently if you could re-live that experience?

Let's take a moment to define what we mean by "fear of the unknown." There are two aspects to the fear of the unknown, and they have to deal with what we can't know and what we don't know.

First, what we can't know. There are things in life that will always be unknown to us. For instance, we can't know the future. No matter what we do, the future will always remain an unknown.

Second, what we don't know. There are areas in life in which we are simply ignorant. For instance, we don't know if an investment would be a good idea or not. Information about the investment is available, but we don't have personal knowledge of it.

Much of the fear of the unknown falls into this second category, and here is the good news: *this is a fear we can do something about*. And that is where this lesson is going to focus.

Let's look at an example:

Suppose your doctor tells you that you have a malfunction of the misdoddlethrop. But then he looks at his watch, tells you your time is up and he has to move on to his next patient. You go home. You're very worried and frightened ... what is a misdoddlethrop? How is it supposed to function? What does a malfunction mean? Is it serious? How serious? Can anything be done about it? What?

Now, you could sit there and stew about it and become miserably frightened ... and plenty of people do. What should you do?

Sure – go to the library. Surf the Web. Read up on it. Call a misdoddlethrop specialist. What you find out may frighten you ... but that would be a different kind of fear, based on solid facts. But perhaps what you find out will reassure you that this is basically irrelevant to your life, so who cares. Regardless, by gaining knowledge, you have at least overcome the fear of the unknown itself.

Much of our fear of the unknown could be resolved by finding out more information. But the fact is, people regularly allow this type of fear to hold them back. Why?

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Let's consider the Israelites, because we're going to learn from them in greater detail how to overcome the fear of the unknown, and how to overcome all those reasons you just named that the fear of the unknown often holds people back.

First, what were some of the things the Israelites didn't know as they stood on the banks of the Jordan river that might have caused them to be afraid?

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We usually tend to imagine the worst, especially when we're afraid. If I have a sharp headache, it's sure to be a brain tumor. If my boss asked me to come in to a meeting at 4:00, I'm probably going to be fired. If my bank calls me up, it's surely because I've been a victim of identity theft.

Look at your list above of what the Israelites didn't know. What "worst case scenario" might they have been imagining?

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So what did the Israelites do? Did they sit there with their knees knocking?

Not at all ... in Joshua chapter 2, we see what they did: they sent in two spies. They couldn't look up "Jericho, fortifications of and fighting strength" on the Web. They had to gather information the old fashioned way ... in person, by sight. <*Read Joshua 2.*>

Let's look at seven keys to overcoming the fear of the unknown from Joshua 2:

**#1: Take action.**

First, you have to take action. Joshua 2:1 says, "Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.'"

Get up from biting your fingernails and do something productive. My business mentor has always told me that worrying is a useless waste of energy. If you find yourself worrying, he says, get off your butt and go do something about the problem that's worrying you. Use your energy productively. Take action.

Fear of the unknown can paralyze you. How do you "take action" if you have regularly allowed fear to paralyze you?

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## #2: Get the total picture.

Notice that Joshua didn't tell the spies to study Jericho only. He said, "View the land – especially Jericho." Fear makes us focus on the one thing that frightens us. But often, the answer lies outside that narrow scope. So when you go to explore the unknown, cast your nets wide. Definitely find out lots about what frightens you, but also explore the whole lay of the land – you might find additional information that is very helpful that you may never have suspected.

Since fear often narrows our focus, what can you do to widen your perspective and get the "big picture" into view?

How do you go about getting information about the "big picture"?

## #3: Go to the heart of the matter.

This is really tough, but when you face the fear of the unknown, you have to look directly at the possibilities that frighten you most to find out the true facts about them. The spies didn't look at Jericho from afar ... verse one says, "So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there."

They went right into Jericho! Into the city! Talk about courage!

In cases of personal fear, this may mean asking questions like:

- Is my parent's illness likely to be fatal?
- Am I going to be laid off?
- Will we have enough money to make it?

Think of either a situation in the past where you were afraid of the unknown, or a current situation you are facing. What is really at the heart of the matter? What are you most afraid of?

What tough questions needed to be asked (for a past situation) or what tough questions do you need to ask now (for a present situation)?

#### **#4: Take your time.**

Notice what it said happened after they entered Jericho: they didn't do a twenty-minute bus tour. They lodged there. When something frightens me, I try to find a quick fix. I want one verse that will answer my questions and calm my soul, and I want it now. I want a brick with the answer from God written on it thrown through my window. I'm petrified, so I want to feel better: NOW.

But the fact is, gaining knowledge to turn the unknown into the known is a lengthy process. We have to steel ourselves to the fact that it's going to take time ... more than one meeting, more than one day, more than one breeze through a set of questions. It's going to take sweat and effort, and that means time.

What can you do to help you persevere through the time it takes to explore the unknown and face your fears?

**#5: Look for allies.**

The Lord rarely asks us to go through things alone. But if we're not looking for the resources and friends he's arranged for us, we might miss them. Let's face it, a harlot named Rahab probably wasn't the spies' first choice of allies. They would have preferred it if God had arranged an ally in the form of the general of the Jericho army, who could tell them the fighting strength of the army and who could order his soldiers to retreat at a strategic moment. But instead, God arranged for Rahab. She hid them, encouraged them, and affirmed that God was at work.

Who are your allies? Who can you count on to help you when you are afraid?

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Have you ever wanted to ask for help and not done so? Why?

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**#6: Move on.**

Oftentimes, we can get caught up in our exploration of facts and we stay there ... when the spies got the information they needed, they got out of there. We need to do that, too. Get the information you need, and then move on.

Why do we sometimes hesitate to move on after we have spent time researching and exploring a situation that frightens us?

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**#7: Assess the facts.**

After the spies had returned, they assessed the facts. They weighed the strength of the city, the walls, the army, the lay of the land ... and what Rahab had told them. And their final assessment can be found in verse 24: "Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us."

It's easy, when exploring new information, to turn fear of the unknown into fear of the known. But oftentimes, that is because we are focusing on the negative – we can't get our eyes off the problems and difficulties. But properly assessing the facts we've learned is imperative: looking at everything, what is the story? What is the result? What can I decide? What should I do? You may like what you've found. You may not. But you need to make sure you are properly assessing the facts so that you've reached a sound conclusion.

How can you be sure that you are making an objective analysis of the information you have gathered about a situation? How do you avoid being inappropriately pessimistic or optimistic?

Take a moment to review the seven steps:

1. **Take action.**
2. **Get the total picture.**
3. **Go to the heart of the matter.**
4. **Take your time.**
5. **Look for allies.**
6. **Move on.**
7. **Assess the facts.**

What are some verses that can help you face your fear of the unknown?

## Fear of Failure

The second major fear we want to look at is the fear of failure. This is the fear that, for whatever reason, I am going to fail if I try this new thing. And that very fear keeps me from even making the attempt.

Now, let's face it ... despite the spies' report, and despite the successful crossing of the Jordan River by a miracle of the Lord, the Israelites had every reason to fear failure. Jericho was big, walled, heavily armed, and well-guarded.

But Israel had something that Jericho didn't: God. And God made a personal appearance to Joshua as Joshua was probably facing the fear of failure ... the fear that he would lead the army against Jericho, and that they would be beaten. <Read *Joshua 5:13-6:5*>

Joshua 5:13-6:5 gives us five tremendous keys for overcoming the fear of failure:

### **#1: Seek the Lord.**

I sincerely doubt that God appeared in person before Joshua if Joshua was not already seeking his face.

How do we seek the Lord?

### **#2: Acknowledge the Lord.**

Notice that God never said he was *for* Joshua ... he said he was the boss. Sometimes, we want God to be on "our side." He's not. The question always is, are we on "his side."

God is sovereign – he's Captain, and he's King. That means that things might not always go the way we want ... but if they go the way he wants, we can be sure that they have always been successful.

What are some examples of times when things didn't go the way a person may have wanted, but that eventually demonstrated God's sovereignty and glory?

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After you seek the Lord, be sure to acknowledge him: his plans, his actions, his decisions. Submit your will to him, knowing that he is not only sovereign, but he is good – he loves you.

**#3: Worship the Lord.**

In verse 15, Joshua removed his sandals and worshipped God. After we have sought the Lord and acknowledged him as Lord, we need to honor him as Lord. Fear of failure focuses our attention on us. Worship focuses our attention on God.

What steps can you take to get your focus off yourself and on God in order to worship him?

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**#4: Listen to the Lord.**

God gave Joshua some very specific instructions. They were nutty instructions, but they were instructions. Fear of failure disappears when we have a plan of attack that is directed by God. That is, when we know God's will.

How do we know God's will?

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**#5: Obey the Lord.**

In the succeeding verses, Joshua proceeded to obey the Lord's nutty instructions – and the walls of Jericho crumbled. All the seeking, acknowledging, worshiping, and listening in the world will do no good if we don't do what God commands.

What are the benefits of continually seeking the Lord and obeying his instructions?

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Take some time to pray about any situations you are currently facing that are causing you fear of the unknown. What steps do you need to take to overcome your fear?

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# Overcoming Fear

## Fear of the Unknown

#1: Take \_\_\_\_\_.

#2: Get the \_\_\_\_\_.

#3: Go to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the matter.

#4: Take your \_\_\_\_\_.

#5: Look for \_\_\_\_\_.

#6: \_\_\_\_\_ on.

#7: \_\_\_\_\_ the facts.

## Fear of Failure

#1: \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord.

#2: \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord.

#3: \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord.

#4: \_\_\_\_\_ to the Lord.

#5: \_\_\_\_\_ the Lord.