**Stepping Out in Faith**

Last week I spoke of putting our heads over the parapet and taking the land that the enemy claims is his. About putting on the armour to foil the inevitable attacks of the enemy when we do so.

I realise that doing that does not necessarily mean going with serenity or without doubts. Faith can be difficult.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Today I want to talk about how we are to step out in faith.

I don’t know about you, but I like to know where I am going and how I am going to get there. I like to have a map and a plan.

Stepping out in faith.

Martin Luther King Jnr once said that Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.

But sometimes even when we do know, the journey can seem daunting.

Sometimes in adventure fantasy movies, the character comes to a chasm, and it seems no way forward, but he steps out into that emptiness and finds that there is an invisible pathway for him to travel on to escape his pursuers.

I could take the usual route for this sermon and talk of Peter walking on the water, but I want to look at 2 stories from the book of Joshua in the OT instead.

Remember Joshua took over leadership of the Israelites after Moses died. Moses had brought them out of Egypt and brought them to the very edge of the Promised land but because of the disobedience of the people, neither he nor the adults who had come out of Egypt were allowed into the Promised Land, and it was left to Joshua to lead the children and grandchildren of the original people into the land.

God said to him *“Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses… No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.* (Joshua 1:2-3, 5-6)

So here was Joshua, anointed by God to lead his people, waiting to cross the border. The border being the River Jordan. He trusted God and trusted God’s word.

Joshua 3:5 *Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.” Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them. And the Lord said to Joshua, “… Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’” Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. … See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.” So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away … while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.*

That is what I call stepping out in faith.

The river Jordan in flood and the priests were carrying the heavy ark. They knew that if the ark dropped then people would die [it had happened before]. So, they approached the swollen river and stepped into it as they had been told by Joshua. I, like you, know how slippery the banks of rivers can be, and I, like you, know how swift flood waters can be. But once they had stood in it, the river stopped flowing and they could pass through on dry land.

The water did not stop flowing until they stepped into it. They had to step into the flood waters. They had to trust that God was going to deliver the impossible.

Faith is not just accepting the truth of God’s word; it is acting on that truth.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Step into the deep waters if you know that is what God has told you to do.

The second story is also from the book of Joshua and follows the crossing of the River Jordan.

After the Israelites had entered the Promised Land, they had the job of removing the Canaanites who were already living there, because God did not want his chosen people to be tainted by the ungodly worship of other gods like Baal and Asherah that the Canaanites worshipped.

The first city they came to was the walled city of Jericho.

It was a well-fortified city, surrounded by a wall, the gate of which was closed at dusk and was ruled by a king.

Here they were to confront a walled city, with walls at least 13 feet (4 meters) in height, made of massive stone walls, with no siege equipment, no battering rams or siege towers. Just themselves.

So, Joshua prayed.

Joshua 5:2 *Then the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 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. 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.” So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, “Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it.” And he ordered the army, “Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord.” When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord’s covenant followed them. The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. But Joshua had commanded the army, “Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!” So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there. Joshua got up early the next morning and [repeated the process for 6 days]... 15 On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! … 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.*

The Battle of Jericho is the first battle the Israelites fought in the Promised Land. And during this battle, God tells Joshua to march around the walls of the city every day, and to blow their horns on the seventh day, and only then will the walls fall down, providing them with victory. This seems like an impossible course of action. And just imagine being an Israelite following Joshua at that time. You’re told that the battle plan is to march around the city every day, for seven days, and to then blow your horn. It definitely sounds insane. Imagine marching around Jericho the first day, and then the second, and then the third. And nothing is happening, and the enemy is probably just laughing and taunting you and the other people marching around the walls. But Joshua kept the faith and did as God said, and on that seventh day, after blowing the horns and the shout, the walls of the city fell down. A miraculous victory indeed.

That is exactly what stepping out in faith is. Doing something that might seem stupid, or confusing, only to then understand in hindsight that God was there, ready to catch you, all along.

Faith is not believing that God can help, but that he will help. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Missionaries Charles and Frances Hunter wrote in their book: If his word says he will do it, he will do it…don’t look at the mountain, look at Jesus! Don’t look at the circumstances, look up to Jesus! Don’t look at the problem, look up to Jesus! Don’t look at the situation as it appears right now, look up and see Jesus.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Jeremiah 32:17 ‘*Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.*

What do we learn from these 2 incidents?

1. The people prayed
2. The people heard from God
3. They did what they were told even it seems an impossibility.
4. Victory was secured.

Let’s unpack those:

First, the people prayed. How will we know what God wants us to do unless we listen to him. Praying is not telling God what to do but listening to what God wants us to do.

As one of my university lecturers wrote: Listening requires a posture of humility that isn’t ‘sexy.’ If you’re really going to hear God, you have to be open to not being right and to seeing something new. [[5]](#footnote-5) In other words, put aside what we think we should do or our own agenda and listen for what God plans.

Another of my lecturers wrote: A necessary virtue is a humble willingness to listen as God guides us.[[6]](#footnote-6) Humility takes us out of a situation of power into a situation of powerlessness, giving God the power.

We make space in our lives so that we are more likely to hear the still, small voice of God when God does speak. We can make ourselves available. We can indicate our willingness to hear and respond. [[7]](#footnote-7)

First thing to do in this and every other thing we do, is to pray. Ask God what he wants us to do. Tell him the problem and wait for his answer.

Secondly, they heard from God.

God is speaking to us all the time, but if we do not have our ears tuned into his wavelength, we can miss it. Joshua listened and Joshua heard.

What he heard was something in the realms of impossibility in human terms. A flooded river stopping flowing, city walls falling without a finger being laid on them.

In Matthew 19:26 Jesus said, “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*

Faith is believing that Christ is what he is said to be, that he will do what he has promised to do and expecting this of him.[[8]](#footnote-8)

And thirdly they did what they were told. No buts, no second guessing, no seeking alternative advice – they listened, heard and did what they had heard.

Each of us must listen for the Voice of God and then obey at all costs.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Even if what he asks seems impossible!

Hudson Taylor, the missionary who founded the China Inland Mission in the 1800s, said this about God doing the impossible in our lives: “There are three stages to every great work of God; first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Stepping out in faith is the act of taking a risk, with the full belief that God will be there to catch you.

It is giving something up and changing direction, because God calls you to it, without knowing where it is you will end up.

It’s taking a leap of faith and trusting in the fact that God will provide you with the right opportunities and paths.

It is not an easy process. But if you see the signs of God calling you to it, you can prepare yourself through prayer, and take that chance, so that you may become the part you were meant to be within God’s plan.

1. John Ortberg *The Life You've Always Wanted* 215 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. David Pawson *The Normal Christian Birth: How to Give New Believers a Proper Start in Life* 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pawson 274 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Charles and Frances Hunter *Don’t Limit God* 17-18 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lynne M. Baab *The Power of Listening: Building Skills for Mission and Ministry* Loc. 2478-80 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marva Dawn *Joy in Divine Wisdom: practices of discernment from other cultures and Christian traditions* 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Baab Loc. 1670-72 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Charles Spurgeon “Faith: what is it?” *Messages to the Multitud*e 62 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. C F Dempster *Finding Men for Christ*, 117 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://pastorrick.com/count-on-god-to-do-the-impossible/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)