

Series: "Psalms in the Summer"
Part 5: "Jumping Over Walls"

We are continuing to look at the Psalms this summer. Today we'll look at Psalm 18 (another psalm attributed to King David). This psalm is an exuberant celebration of God's deliverance and victory in his life! "He reached down from on high, he took me; he drew me out of mighty waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me; for they were too mighty for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity; but the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a broad place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me" (Psalm 18: 16-19). The verse I want to highlight today is later in the psalm; it is verse 29: "By you I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall."

Bishop Gerald Kennedy, in a sermon on this, said we are confronted here by words that sound as if they were written by a teenager! It's like the psalm writer is so thrilled with an experience of God that he is shouting to the world: "There is nothing that can bind me or hold me if I know the presence of God! Life is unlimited, and all things are possible, if a person knows God!" Kennedy said, "It is a great word for our generation...". "By you I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall" (Psalm 18:29).

The Christian life is meant to be a life of victory! God meant us to jump over walls that would block us from joyful, creative, effective Christian living. I'm thinking of 2 different types of Christian believers. The first is the person who is an "up" person – positive, hopeful – one who has a faith that radiates a sense of joyful victory over the obstacles that life puts in their way. The other is a person who is negative, whining – easily discouraged, who dotes on his or her difficulties, and is rarely able to rise above negative circumstances and live triumphantly for the Lord. But when we read the Bible, we get the impression that God doesn't want us to be defeated by life's problems and evil. As the psalmist says, we were meant to leap over walls!

David not only one to claim God's unlimited power for life! The *Apostle Paul* did too! In Romans 8:37 he writes, "We are more than conquerors through (Christ) who loved us." He boldly proclaims, "Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph" (2 Corinthians 2:14). And in Ephesians 3:20-21 he shares these uplifting words, "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

A pastor friend of mine when I was young would every once in a while ask me "Harry, do you have the victory?" Good question! Do *you* have the victory? God intended for us to jump over walls, to be overcomers in the face of temptations, difficulties, and set-backs. "By you I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall" (Psalm 18:29).

But it's easy to become defeated, isn't it? Life can be hard. There are walls that can close us in. Sometimes we find ourselves *climbing the walls* instead of *leaping over walls*! Years ago, there was a popular cowboy song, "Don Fence Me In". "Give me land, lots of land, under starry skies above, don't fence me in." A psychologist analyzed that song and said the reason it was so

popular is because every person feels fenced in and wants to protest. The writer of Psalm 18 encountered walls too: “The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord” (verses 4-6a). Haven’t you ever felt boxed in like that, like you’ve come up against a brick wall 60 feet high and there is no way over?

There are many kinds of “walls” that can block us and defeat us. ***There is the wall of hate and resentment – an unforgiving spirit.*** I once went back to preach in a church I had formerly served. It was a small country church. Just before I had left that church, two men in the church started a business together. One of the men remortgaged his house to get the capital needed to start the new company; the other quit a secure job. This venture fulfilled a life-long dream for the one man in particular. But the business went under. The economy and job market took a dive and they were caught in it. I had heard that there were bitter hard feelings between the two men, who had been friends.

One of the men and his wife were there the morning I preached. We talked. I asked whether he was back working with the contractor for whom he had worked for before. He said yes. But I didn’t push the subject. I sensed that it still was a really touchy situation, still far from being healed. I also had a hunch that this wall of bitter resentment between the two men was not only robbing these men of their joy in Christ, but also disrupting the life of that little congregation.

There is the wall of our own lack of self-control. I was listening one day to a Christian radio station, and a family counseling program. A teenager had written to the host of the program. She told how her mom and dad were separated. She acted so miserably that her mom kicked her out of the house. She was living with her dad, but he was threatening to give her the boot too. In the letter she admitted that it wasn’t their fault. She said “I know it’s the miserable way I act. And I’m a Christian. What can I do?” How many of us, if we are honest, have to admit our own lack of self-control! Maybe in our desire for food, or alcohol, or sex...or spending...or our temper, or our tendency to criticize and complain. *Like a wall that hems us in!*

Then there is the wall of life’s diminishing opportunities. The older we get, the more life can close us in.

When we are in our late teens, early twenties, we may feel the sky’s the limit as to choices – who we’re going to marry (if we marry), what career we’ll pursue, etc. But it doesn’t take long for the options to be narrowed – the older we get, our opportunities become more limited. We may graduate, get a degree, and discover that there are no jobs open in our field. And once we’re out of our parents’ house we discover that rent and mortgage payments aren’t cheap. Or if we have children, there are dirty diapers and colds and ear infections, and little time for one’s self or partner.

Our *physical body* gradually wears out with the years. How many of us can say that we are more agile, more limber, more energetic than we were 30 years ago? When I was younger I played ice hockey and softball. I couldn’t wait to get to the games, to go out on the ice or on the ball field!

I was filled with so much energy at times that it felt like I was going to explode! Well, I haven't been close to any explosions of energy lately! Now, if I mow the lawn, or do yard work, I feel all tired and stiff. There are some interesting words in the Book of Joshua, as Caleb describes himself. Caleb says, "And now as you see, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel was journeying through the wilderness; and here I am today, eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was on the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war, and for going and coming" (Joshua 14:10-11). Wow! Don't I wish! Don't you wish!

Then, there is the wall of sorrow. When we lose someone, or something significant – a loved one, our job, our marriage – we can feel like that wall of grief is too high to ever climb over. I'm thinking of an older man in a congregation I served whose wife died. After a while, he began to set his eyes on a younger woman in the church who wasn't married. He sang in the choir, and would flirt with her as he sat in the choir. They eventually married and have a wonderful marriage. He once told me, after a while following the death of his wife he said to himself, I can sit in my rocker the rest of my life and be miserable, or get on with my life and not care about what other people may think! But some of us may not be at that point. We are still hemmed in by a wall of sorrow and grief.

There are so many kinds of **walls** that can close in on us, and prevent us from living with joy and power in Christ. But when we read the words of Psalm 18, we see that with God, we **can leap over walls!** The psalmist said, "By my God I can leap over a wall" (Psalm 18:29). God wants to help us overcome the things that would bind us, and to live the life of victory for His honor and glory.

But how? That's the question, isn't it? How? ***First, it begins in our thinking, in our attitude.*** Our *thought life* helps determine how we function. Whether we live with a negative attitude of gloom and doom, or a positive attitude of faith and hope, *is a choice!* Norman Vincent Peale was a Christian minister who inspired many people to live a more positive, faith-directed life (through books like *The Power of Positive Thinking*). Dr. Peale once said the average person looks at problems in the wrong way. We react to problems in a negative way, with dull defeatism. We see them as bad things, something unpleasant, with which we have to deal. But it's so much better if we see that having problems is a sign of life and opportunity. He told of walking down 5th Avenue in New York City one day, meeting a friend named George, who looked depressed and glum. Dr. Peale asked, "How are you, George?" George spent the next 15 minutes giving every detail of how badly he felt. "It's these problems," he growled. "Nothing but problems and more problems. I'm fed up with problems." Dr. Peale said, "Well, I'd like to help you." George replied: "I wish you would...in fact, I'll give you \$1000 if you'll get me relief and release from this mass of problems." Dr. Peale said he wasn't about to turn down this kind of offer. "Well, George, maybe I can offer a thought that might be helpful, though you might not like it. I was recently in a place where there were over 100,000 people and not a single person had a problem." "Where this place? That's for me!" George chirped, with the first sign of enthusiasm. Peale answered: "The place is Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. No one in Woodlawn has a problem...nothing concerns them. They're all dead."

To be an overcomer, we need a change of *attitude*. Do we see life's problems and difficulties as huge walls that hem us in, or as signs of life, opportunities for God to work, and for us to grow?

Secondly, we overcome through the power of faith. The writer of Psalm 18 had faith in God! "I love you, O Lord my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:1-2). Many times *Jesus* talked about how we overcome the difficult and destructive things in life through *faith*. Jesus would say to someone seeking healing, "According to your faith let it be done to you" (Matthew 9:29). He said, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). 1 John 5:4-5 reminds us: "Whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Notice, it is those "born of God" who conquer the world – those born again! Those "who believe that Jesus is the Son of God" are the ones who conquer the world! To "believe" in the Bible is more than just believing certain facts about Jesus – it is the surrender of our entire self to Him in trust.

I like what Norman Vincent Peale said about this. He said the reason many of us do not experience the true liberating power of faith is that though we may have *some faith* in God, we are not a believer *in depth*. "How is this deeper release of power effected in human beings? Simply by the act of surrender; but it must be a thoroughgoing, utterly desirous surrender to Jesus Christ...then He...gives the power in response to (this) faith...". If I am a Christian, and my life is colored by defeat, one of the most important questions is: Have I really relinquished all that I am and have to Christ? Nothing held back? Am I trusting that He can take hold of the situation and bring an outcome that will glorify His name?

Do we want to leap over walls like the writer of Psalm 18? It takes a more *positive attitude*...it takes *faith* rooted in the surrender of our entire self to Christ. And also it involves ***prayer - we jump over walls through the power of prayer.*** Note what the psalm writer says: "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised...in my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears" (verses 3,6). He called upon the Lord! He prayed! *No one* can live victoriously in the realm of spiritual things unless we take time to pray, to align ourselves with the *purposes* of God, and to expose ourselves to the *presence* and *power* of God.

In Mark 9, there is a story about a father who brought a demon-possessed boy to Jesus' disciples for healing, but they were unable to heal him. When Jesus arrived, He healed the boy. Later, in private, the disciples said to Jesus, "Why couldn't we cast the demon out?" Jesus' answer? "This kind can come out only through *prayer*" (Mark 9:29).

Illust. A number of years ago Judge Harold Medina of New York presided over a case that made national headlines. He tells how the tension and torment of that sensational case had worn him almost to the breaking point. He said, "I had to leave the court room and lie down in my chambers. I was thinking then that perhaps I should never go back. In my weakness it seemed

to me at last that I had stood as much as I could for as long as I could. I was ready to give up.

“But, instead, like a frightened child calling to his father in the dark, I asked God to take charge of things and that His will be done. I cannot report any mysterious or supernatural experience as a result of that prayer. All I know is that, as I lay on the couch in the heat of that darkened chamber, some kind of new strength seems to flow into my veins. That brief period of communion with (God) saved my life and saved the trial. After 15 minutes I was refreshed, and went back to carry on the business of my court. And I gained in strength from that moment on to the end. For Someone else was with me, all the way.”

The psalmist said, “By my God, *I can* leap over a wall...” (Psalm 18:29). You and I have an unlimited potential to leap over the walls in life that hem us in, and to be victorious through Christ!

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