



Chapter Excerpt from
You Want Me To Do What?
Get Off Your Blessed Assurance and Do Something!

You Want Me to Learn From My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

Joshua 7-8

How much damage can one traitor do?

Single-handedly, a traitor named Clyde Lee Conrad could have caused the defeat of America in a World War III nuclear scenario. Conrad was a retired army sergeant living in Germany who sold top secret information to Soviet bloc spies in the 1970s and 1980s, earning well over \$1 million for his treachery. He also recruited other army retirees and enlisted men, paying them for intelligence that he resold to the enemy at a profit.

Conrad's most damaging act of betrayal was the sale of the General Defense Plan, NATO's top secret plans for responding to a Soviet attack. The plans Conrad sold to the Communists described in detail exactly what the United States and NATO would do if the Soviets invaded Western Europe—where military units would be positioned, how a defense would be mounted, and the nature of all NATO's strengths and weaknesses. With the sale of those plans, Conrad gave the Soviets the entire game plan for a World War III.

Conrad was arrested in 1988 and convicted of espionage and treason in 1990. He was sentenced to life in prison, and he died of a heart attack in 1998 while confined in a German jail cell. He was fifty years old.

The German judge who presided over Conrad's trial described how this one man's crime could have led to utter defeat for the West—and the deaths of millions of people in a nuclear holocaust. "If war had broken out between NATO and the Warsaw Pact," the judge concluded, "the West would have faced certain defeat. NATO would have quickly been forced to choose between capitulation or the use of nuclear weapons on German territory. Conrad's treason had doomed the Federal Republic [of Germany] to become a nuclear battlefield."

The Ambush at Ai

We now come to what is undoubtedly the most heartbreaking and tragic section of the entire book of Joshua. The people of Israel have just entered the Promised Land and, through faith in the power of God, they have won an amazing victory over the Canaanite foe. But immediately after this thrilling triumph, the Israelites are about to suffer a devastating setback. And one man's moral and spiritual weakness will result in death and defeat for his nation, shame for his family, and the tragic end of his own life.

This is a story of how God's people were ambushed from without and betrayed from within.

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

You probably know what it feels like to be ambushed or betrayed. Few experiences are more emotionally devastating than that. You are going about your life when a sudden disaster strikes. You feel as if a trapdoor has opened beneath your feet. You learn that for weeks or months, while you thought life was going along smoothly, someone you counted on has been betraying you, deceiving you, ruining your reputation, and undermining the very foundation of your life.

Out of the blue, your spouse tells you, “I’m leaving you. I want a divorce.”

Or your business partner is arrested and you discover that he has been secretly, systematically plundering the company you’ve built—and you’re left with nothing.

Or the son or daughter who always seemed to walk with the Lord now gives you the shocking news: “I’m pregnant”; “I’m addicted to drugs”; “I don’t believe in God anymore.”

You cry out to God, “Why, Lord? Why is this happening?” and you have been ambushed. You have gone from victory to a sudden and unexpected defeat. That is what happened to the people of Jericho, when they went up against the Canaanite stronghold, the city of Ai.

The catastrophe at Ai in Joshua 7 was foreshadowed in Joshua 6, shortly before the conquest of Jericho began. There, Joshua told the Israelites what they should do with any “devoted things,” objects of silver and gold the Canaanites used in their pagan religious ceremonies:

Keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.

(Josh. 6:18-19)

In the opening verses of Joshua 7, we come upon these ominous words: “But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord’s anger burned against Israel” (Josh 7:1).

Who acted unfaithfully? “The Israelites,” the Scriptures tell us. How many Israelites were actually involved in the theft of the devoted objects? One man, “Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah.” One man committed a sin that would prove destruction to the entire nation of Israel.

The account tells us that Joshua sent spies into Ai, just as he had sent spies into Jericho. The spies returned with a glowing report. The city of Ai would be a pushover. “Not all the people will have to go up against Ai,” the spies reported. “Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there” (Josh. 7:3). Israel’s overconfidence led directly to an ambush:

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

(Josh. 7:4-5)

Joshua was devastated by the defeat of Israel at Ai. He tore his clothes and fell upon his face before the Ark of the Covenant. The elders of the nation joined Joshua, covering their heads with dust as a sign of mourning.

And Joshua cried out,

Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth.

(Josh. 7:7-9)

The Lord told Joshua to stand up—then He told Joshua the reason for Israel’s ambush and defeat:

Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, “Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.”

(Josh. 7:11-13)

So the next morning, Joshua had all the Israelites come forward and present themselves before the Lord, tribe by tribe, clan by clan, family by family, and ultimately man by man. Through this process of elimination, Joshua zeroed in on Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah. And Achan confessed:

It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.

(Josh. 7:20-22)

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

Joshua sent messengers to search Achan's tent. They brought out the stolen items and spread them on the ground before all of Israel, in the sight of the Lord. And Joshua said to Achan, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today" (Josh. 7:25).

And Achan was executed by stoning, and everything he owned was destroyed in a place called the Valley of Achor (the Hebrew word *achor* means "trouble"). A large pile of rocks was erected over the site of Achan's execution (see Josh. 7:26).

Responding to Trials and Tragedy

Some people look at Bible passages like this one and draw the conclusion that when bad things happen to believers, it is always a judgment from God. That's not true. Trials and tragedies are simply a part of living in a fallen world. God's people sometimes suffer through no fault of their own.

However, it is also true that God often uses adversity in our lives to make us aware of our need for change. Sometimes when we suffer, our suffering is a consequence of a wrong or sinful choice we have made. So when we encounter a trial of adversity, we need to examine our own lives and ask ourselves, *Is God trying to get my attention? Are these problems a result of sin in my life?*

We need to pray, "Lord, what are You trying to tell me? What are You trying to teach me? I don't want to miss any of the lessons you have for me, so please help me to hear and understand what You are saying to me through this trial."

When Israel suffered a setback at Ai, Joshua immediately responded by casting himself down before God in prayer. He wanted to understand the reason for this mysterious and devastating setback. He wanted to root out the sin that had resulted in death and defeat for the Israelite people. So he, together with the elders of the nation of Israel, went to God with their faces on the ground and sought an answer to the troubling question of their defeat.

Joshua is a great role model for how we as Christians should respond to trials and tragedy. All too often, when we suffer a defeat or loss, our response is to complain: "God, it's not fair! This shouldn't be happening! I shouldn't have to suffer like this!" We turn a blind eye to the very thing God wants us to confront. We rationalize our sins and refuse to give them up. We deny our sins instead of confessing them and repenting of them. We resist God as He tugs at our consciences. We sweep our dirty secrets under the rug instead of allowing God to clean house.

Do you recall what Joshua said when he fell on his face before God? "Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?" (Josh. 7:7). It was commendable for Joshua to go to God with his questions—but do you not detect a note of accusation in that question? Joshua is saying, "Lord, how could You do that to us? You've let us down! Did You bring us all this way just to hand us over to our enemies? Lord, You owe us an explanation!"

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

This is a very human response on Joshua's part. It is often our nature to question God whenever we face a loss or defeat. I have done so. I'm sure you have as well. We think God has let us down, and so we blame Him for our troubles.

But God did not let Israel down. The nation of Israel was betrayed from within. Someone in the camp broke the covenant. Someone disobeyed God's injunction. Someone stole what belonged to God. The result of that disobedience was defeat—not merely for one man, but for the entire nation of Israel. Innocent men died and the battle was lost because of one man's betrayal and hidden sin.

It's important to understand that the seeds of Israel's defeat at Ai were planted at the very moment of Israel's triumph over Jericho. This is a scenario we all can relate to as Christians. When we are struggling with problems in our lives, when we are facing rivers of impossibility and fortresses of fear, we recognize our need for God. We become like prayer warriors. We purge sin from our lives and we earnestly seek to live godly lives.

So God in His mercy answers our prayers He delivers us and leads us into triumph over our adversity. We are ecstatic, joyful, and grateful to God—for a while.

But that euphoric sense of gratitude doesn't last long. We become comfortable and perhaps a little smug. Things are going well now. We think we don't need God's help at the moment. We think we don't need to pray as much as we once did. And if we start returning to those former bad habits, we figure He will understand. He'll overlook a few sins. No need to confess or repent, because life is pretty good.

Perhaps that was the attitude of Achan. He had marched with the army of Israel, and he had seen the walls of Jericho destroyed by trumpet blasts and a shout. This was the moment of Israel's triumph. Achan was overjoyed and grateful to God.

But as Achan plundered one of the Canaanite storehouses, something caught his eye. He saw a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of shining silver, and a gleaming wedge of gold. In the moment of Israel's triumph, Achan coveted the things that belonged to God—and he took them. At the very moment that the rest of the nation of Israel was celebrating victory, Achan was stealing and ensuring a future defeat.

Perhaps you can identify with Achan. Perhaps, when life has been good and problems have been few, you lost your sense of gratitude. Your prayers become sporadic. You lost touch with God. And sins that were once unthinkable soon became habitual.

You experienced defeat. You experienced an ambush. And, like Joshua, you found yourself crying out to the Lord, "Why Lord? Why is this happening to me?"

A New Beginning

Defeat does not have to be the end of your story. You have fallen down, but God wants to lift you up. You've been knocked out of action, but God wants to restore you to usefulness for Him. There are three stages to every experience of defeat and restoration. These stages follow one another as day follows night.

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

1. Carelessness
2. Calamity
3. Closure

Let's take a closer look at each.

Stage 1: Carelessness

One of the greatest dangers facing Christians today is that they underestimate the destructive power of sin. They say, "I know what the Bible says about sin—but that doesn't apply to my situation. After all, I'm saved by God's grace. Jesus died on the cross for my sins and I have liberty in Him. Oh, I know I shouldn't do some of the things I do—but God in His grace overlooks my sins. I'm not worried about any consequences."

Underneath this lax attitude toward sin is a burning, raging conscience. Though we may try to justify or rationalize our disobedience, we know deep down God does not overlook sin. We may become casual and careless about sin, but God never does. And only a fool takes God's grace for granted.

That's why the Scriptures tell us, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). The sin of disobedience is serious—but equally serious is the sin of presumption. We should never take the grace, mercy, and goodness of God for granted. Our attitude toward God's grace should be one of grateful obedience, not presumptuous sin. Let me suggest to you some areas in which we often rationalize our disobedience:

Disobedience in our finances. God said the tithe belongs to the Lord, and He will pour out His blessing on us if we are obedient to Him in our finances:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

(Mal. 3:10)

Yet we are quick to rationalize a choice to spend God's tithes on ourselves. According to George Barna, director of The Barna Group, Ltd., tithing has become "uncommon" in churches today. He writes,

For a number of years, The Barna Group has . . . been following the practice of "tithing," which is donating at least ten percent of one's income. . . . Very few Americans tithed in 2004. Only 4 percent gave such an amount to churches alone; just 6 percent gave to either churches or to a combination of churches and parachurch ministries.²

Our giving to God should be punctual, regular, and cheerful. Under the Old Testament, tithing was a requirement of the law. But under the New Testament, the principle of Christian giving is based on love and gratitude to God. We are no longer under the law, which demanded that 10 percent of our earnings go to God. We are under the new covenant, under which we acknowledge that everything we are and everything we own belongs to God, and we gratefully give a portion back to Him. As the apostle

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

Paul said, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Disobedience in our ethical behavior. Your integrity and ethical behavior are essential to your witness in this sinful and dying world. If your behavior as a Christian is no different from the way the world behaves, what difference does it make? What example do you set for the people around you that would make them eager and hungry to know more about your faith?

Many Christians explain away their unethical behavior, saying, "You have to cut a few corners to compete in the business world today. Integrity is old-fashioned. In today's economy, you do what it takes to survive."

Well, I won't kid you. There may be times when you will have to pay a price to maintain your integrity. Maintaining your Christian ethical standards could cost you a sale, a promotion, or even your career. But your willingness to pay the price for maintaining your integrity could be the very thing that impacts the people around you for Jesus Christ.

I recently had a conversation with a brilliant young Christian businessman. He had been with his company for fourteen years and was highly regarded in his field. But he had reached an invisible ceiling and was stuck there, unable to obtain a promotion. When he asked his superiors why other, less-qualified people were being promoted ahead of him, they gave him vague excuses and told him he needed to be patient.

Finally, one of his coworkers told him candidly that the word around the office was that this young Christian executive was being kept out of upper management because he would not lie or cheat the customers. He was paying a price because of his reputation for integrity. This was a hard thing for this young man to hear, but he told me that his one consolation was he now knew he had a reputation for honesty around the office. Even if he didn't get a promotion, he knew he had a witness.

Integrity isn't cheap, but it's worth every cent it costs you. If you are willing to trade your integrity for mere money and status, then you are to be pitied. As Jesus said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Disobedience in our sexual and moral behavior. King David stood on his rooftop and saw a beautiful woman bathing below. He could have turned away—but instead, he stayed, he looked, and he lusted. That moment of lust led to his undoing. He followed the urgings of his lust into the depths of adultery and murder. He arranged for the death of another man and took that man's wife as his own.

When David's sin was revealed, God, speaking through the prophet Nathan, told David, "Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own" (2 Sam. 12:10). This prediction was fulfilled when David's beloved son Absalom led a revolt against David and plunged the kingdom of Israel into civil war.

And it all began with a moment of lust.

What kinds of thoughts occupy the secret places of your mind? How do you use your computer when no one else is looking? What kinds of programs do you watch on television? What kinds of movies do you view? What kinds of books do you read? What kinds of thoughts do you have about other people in your neighborhood, at your office, or on your campus? Do you think about how to reach them for Christ—or would you be ashamed of your thoughts if they were revealed to the world?

The Carelessness of Achan. God does not take a lax attitude toward sin, and neither should we. You may be able to justify or rationalize your disobedience for a while, but sooner or

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

later the consequences of sin will catch up to you. You may think, *It's just a little sin. It doesn't hurt anyone.* Yet it was just a little bite from the forbidden fruit that doomed Adam's race to death. And it was just a robe, a few pieces of silver, and the bar of gold that Achan stole, yet it cost Israel the victory at Ai. Sin is like a pebble cast into a pond, and you never know how far its ripples will spread.

The seventeenth-century English preacher Jeremiah Burroughs put it well when he warned, "Take heed of secret sins. They will undo thee if loved and maintained: one moth may spoil the garment; one leak may drown the ship; a penknife stab can kill a man as well as a sword."³

One of the great dangers of secret sin is that it breeds complacency within us. When we act in disobedience to the Word of God, and God does not immediately punish us for our disobedience, we tend to misinterpret God's patience and grace. We think, *God's not displeased at all! It looks as if I got away with it!* So one sin leads to another and soon becomes a habit of sin.

But God is not pleased. He is waiting for us to come to our senses and repent, but we should not mistake his kindness for laxness. The consequences of our sin are accruing and the bill will eventually come due.

Who was this man Achan? Can we dismiss him as nothing more than a thief with a lust for silver and gold? Or is he more like us than we want to admit? Perhaps he stole because he was fearful and insecure, and he thought that possessing a few items of silver and gold would enable him to store up provisions for the future and better provide for his family. We should ask ourselves, *In what ways am I like Achan? And what can I learn from his tragic story?*

Remember what we learned in the previous chapter: fear and faith are like the two ends of a seesaw. When fear is up, faith is down. When faith is up, fear is down. I think Achan was probably a fearful man. He felt insecure about the future. He didn't trust in the constancy of God's provision. He worried about whether he would have enough money to provide for his family.

Achan's level of fear was high—so his level of faith was low. So at the moment of Israel's triumph in Jericho, Achan was unable to trust in God's provision. Even though God provided manna for the Israelites to eat during their forty years in the wilderness, Achan did not trust God to provide. Even though God enabled Israel to cross the river of impossibility, Achan did not trust God to deliver.

It was as if Achan were saying, "Yes, I know of all the great things God has done in the past, but how do I know He will continue to do great things in the future? What if He forgets us? What if He abandons us? How do I know I can trust God in the future?"

This is deadly thinking. If you think God did great things in the past but may not take care of you in the future, you have no trust in His faithfulness. Your fearful and faithless attitude will lead you into carelessness about sin. That's where Achan's carelessness led him—straight into the second stage: calamity.

Stage 2: Calamity

Achan's careless disobedience brought disaster not only to himself, but to his family and his entire community. We think our secret sins affect no one but ourselves. We think we can hoard our tithes and offerings and it won't matter to God or to the church. We think, God doesn't need my money. And that's true, He doesn't. But we need to give!

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

God tells us in His Word,

“Will a man rob God?” Yet you rob me. But you ask, “How do we rob you?” In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. “Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Mal. 3:8–10)

You might think, *Well, Michael Youssef is just trying to manipulate people into giving money to his ministry.* I assure you, I am only talking about this subject because I am committed to teaching everything taught in God’s Word. He says that those who withhold the tithe are robbing Him, so if you carry this principle to its logical conclusion, people who withhold their tithes from God are driving to church in stolen cars, sitting in church wearing stolen clothes, and sitting down to a Sunday supper of stolen food.

God will be patient with us for a while—but only for a while. And when His patience comes to an end—calamity! And when we cry out to God in the midst of our calamity, He will say to us, “Remember what I told you in My Word.” Carelessness inevitably leads to calamity.

God gave Israel the victory by leading the people across the river of impossibility. He gave them the victory when, at the sound of trumpets and a shout, He threw down the walls of Jericho. God wants His people to be victorious. He wants us to go from one glorious victory to the next, from one great height to an even greater height, from one mountaintop to an even higher mountaintop.

God takes no pleasure in our setbacks and defeats. Calamity is not His will for our lives. He wants us to experience the joy of abundant living. He wants us to move ever deeper into an intimate experience with Him. He is pleased to use us to touch the lives of others. He places people in our path so we will reach out to them and share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

My friend, do not be careless with sin, for carelessness leads to calamity, and calamity will mar your testimony. Don’t let Satan lull you into becoming lax with sin. Examine yourself. Put an end to your denials and rationalizations. Purge the hidden sin from your life, and keep your witness for Christ pure and untarnished. Do that, and you will be ready for the next stage: closure.

Step 3. Closure

In Book VIII of his Confessions, Saint Augustine wrote:

At the beginning of my youth, I begged You to make me virtuous, and I said, “Give me chastity and self-control—only not yet.” For I feared that You would hear me too soon, and that You would quickly cure me of the disease of my sinful desires. I wanted to satisfy those desires, not extinguish them. (author’s paraphrase)⁴

Perhaps you can identify with Augustine’s confession. Perhaps you have wanted to satisfy sinful desires, not extinguish them. You know that those sins are wrong and dangerous to you and the people around you. You would like God to purge those sins from your life—but not yet.

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

So you say, “Lord, I definitely plan to get rid of those sins someday. But there’s plenty of time. No need to rush things.”

That attitude of carelessness toward sin is keeping you from being an effective witness for Christ. It is keeping you from experiencing victory in your life. It is an Achan-like attitude destined to lead you to calamity unless you can find the closure God wants you to experience.

What kind of closure am I talking about? Repentance. This means you turn to God and say, “Lord, I want to be fully obedient to You. I want you to extract all the hidden sin out of my life—not ‘someday,’ but now. Lord, I turn from my sin. I choose full obedience to you. Seal this commitment and give me the power to keep it.”

Don’t make the mistake of thinking you can repent of your sin once and for all, and that all temptation will go away. You will be tempted. You may fail a time or two. But God knows if your desire to repent is sincere. When you fall, He will lift you up and tell you, “Try again, My child.”

In the Old Testament book of Hosea, there is an amazing passage where God speaks of Israel as a wife who has betrayed the relationship by committing adultery. In that passage, God says:

*“I will punish her for the days
she burned incense to the Baals;
she decked herself with rings and jewelry,
and went after her lovers,
but me she forgot,”
declares the LORD. (Hosea 2:13)*

At first glance, the Lord’s words seem angry. He speaks of punishing Israel for her infidelity. But he goes on to declare his gracious love for Israel:

*Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the desert
and speak tenderly to her.
There I will give her back her vineyards,
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she will sing as in the days of her youth,
as in the day she came up out of Egypt. (Hosea 2:14–15)*

God says he will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. What is the Valley of Achor? As we’ve seen, it’s the place where Achan was executed by stoning. The name of the place means “trouble.” And God, through the prophet Hosea, tells us that this place where Achan confessed his sin, then paid the consequences of his sin, shall become a door of hope.

When we confess our sins and purge disobedience from our lives, we pass through a door of hope. We experience a new beginning in our lives. It’s the beginning of a new ministry, the beginning of a new testimony, the beginning of a new life of faithfulness to God.

You Want Me To Learn from My Mistakes?

Chapter 6

Don't Ignore the Warning Signs

As I write these words, it has only been a matter of months since my brother went to be with the Lord at the age of sixty-eight. He was a brilliant economist and one of the godliest men I've ever known. He was instrumental in leading me to the Lord. I love him and miss him dearly.

Two years before his death, I learned he had been having physical symptoms that sounded like the warning signs of colon cancer. Knowing him as I do, I pleaded with him to get medical attention for these symptoms. But because he was a man of a certain mind-set, he dismissed the symptoms and refused to see a doctor.

Finally, the symptoms became so serious he could no longer ignore them. He went into the hospital and the doctors performed surgery, but by that time the cancer had run rampant in his body. There was no hope of saving him.

My friend, please hear me out. Disobedience to God is a deadly spiritual cancer. Do not ignore the warning signs. Do not dismiss these symptoms. Do not rationalize the hidden sin eating away at your spiritual life and your relationship with God.

Yes, you can ignore the symptoms for a while, but the disease continues its deadly progression. There is only one way to deal with it, and that is to expel it from your life. You cannot afford to be careless with sin any more than you can afford to be careless with cancer. Purge this malignancy now before it robs you of your spiritual vitality.

Then, when you have cleansed your life, prepare yourself for the victory God will give you. Walk through the door of hope that opens before you.

Israel was defeated at Ai because of Achan's sin. But the defeat at Ai was not the end of Israel's story. After Achan confessed his sin, God wrote a new chapter in the story of Israel. Joshua 7 is the story of Achan's sin and Israel's defeat. But Joshua 8 is the story of how, after the sin was purged, God told Joshua, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land" (Joshua 8:1).

So Joshua and the army of Israel ambushed the army of Ai and conquered the city. Then Joshua built an altar to the God of Israel on Mount Ebal, and he offered sacrifices upon the altar. There he read the words of the Law of Moses before all the assembled people of Israel, and Israel reaffirmed its covenant with the Lord.

Carelessness with sin leads to calamity. But like Israel, we can move from calamity to closure through repenting and purging our sin. Once we have moved to closure with God, we can step through the door of hope—and walk through the gates of victory.