

Russell Kelfer

Discouraged Hearts & Bad Decisions

#1367-B

**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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Satan is the master of the discouraged heart. He knows exactly how to take a word here, and an incident there, and pull down the window shades of your heart until you can no longer see the sun.

That's his trademark. He is positively the producer of negative thoughts. His gospel is the opposite of Philippians 4:8. His word, though more insidious, could be translated:

“Finally, my friends, whatsoever things are disheartening, whatsoever things are depressing, whatsoever things are distressing; if there be any fear, if there be any frustration, if there be any fruitlessness, think on these things.”

And think on those things, we do. At the slightest provocation, our hearts tend to see the half empty glass as only half full; the impending trial, not as a test, but as a trauma; not as an opportunity to grow, but as another example of how unfair life can be. We narrowly miss an accident, and instead of praising God for delivering us, we scorn society for allowing such careless drivers on the street.

But praise God, Satan is a liar, and there is a better way. Life is not to be lived on the brink of despair but on the precipice of victory. And the great danger in the Christian life is that we will make key decisions when our hearts are buried in a state of depression, rather than waiting until our perspective returns once again, or worse still, that we will make decisions based on the world's view of circumstances, rather than on the precious promises of God.

With that somewhat ominous beginning behind us, we embark once more on our journey via the Wilderness Express back in time to one of the most crucial days in Israeli history. God's "Main Man, Moses" was nearing the end of his incredible life. He had been the epitome of a leader, and except for one key moment, when he succumbed to pride, his had been a life as a virtually flawless example of a what a man of God should be, and how a man of God should lead.

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He was strong and consistent; yet he was meek and gentle. He was faithful to the truth, but he was aware of the frailties of man. He was enough of a visionary to see the big picture, but enough of a realist to take one day at a time. He could see the enemies of God for who they were, but when he saw them through the lens of God's word, his fear gave way to faith, and he became a man of unflinching courage.

And as he stood in his pulpit this day, perhaps before one of the largest congregations in history, he had a word from God. It was both an encouraging word and a graphic reminder of past words unheeded. He was at the end of his life, but the people were at the beginning of the adventure they had dreamed of all their lives, an adventure their parents had to forego because of their unbelief.

Moses had their attention. Boy, did he have their attention. He began his message without apology and without either illustration or humor. He had a word from God and that was what he had come to share. It was this:

Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount:

Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.

(Deuteronomy 1:6b-8)

“Ye have dwelt in this state long enough.” What a powerful expression. A parent lets his child drag out a task that should have been accomplished in minutes. Finally, in love, he or she says to the little dear, “Okay, Janice, that’s long enough.” Janice knows what that means. It means the sand in the timer has all run out. It means the buzzer on the stove went off. It means Dad is in the car waiting and it’s getting warm out there. It means “Time’s up.” In this case, it wasn’t that God had run out of patience, it was that God’s patience has stretched all the way through the forty year span of their wandering, and He was still going to give them the land He had promised their fathers. It means the time of their nomadic incarceration had run its course. Freedom was on the horizon. The day of deliverance could be envisioned in the

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not so distant future. It means, “You don’t have to wander any more. Let’s go.”

Wandering is a deadly habit. It lulls the mind to sleep and robs the heart of its vision. The very word means to “move about with no sense of purpose or direction”. It is a life that is lived in robotic neutral. There is no map; there is no course; there is no goal. It is playing football without a goal line. It is running a race that has no finish. It is entering each new day with no way of knowing at the end of the day whether or not you have made any progress.

And because of their unbelief, the now deceased prior generation had been sentenced to *a lifetime of wandering*. Time had now run its course, and the succeeding generation, *who had never known any other existence but wandering*, now faced a test similar to the one their parents had failed. In fact, the conditions were virtually the same. They had a promise from God, and no physical, visible proof that the promise would come true. To obtain that promise, however, they had to live as though God was who He said He was and He would do what He said He would do. It was something called “faith”, and it put the burden of deliverance on God, but the burden of choice on them.

Moses was insistent that this generation not make the same mistake. And so he called a congregational meeting and he let the word go forth. I trust he had to rent the domed stadium for this one. He possibly had to let the overflow crowd view the proceedings on closed circuit television. This was the mega-church of his day in session, and the message was going to require an invitation and a response.

Just what had happened those forty long years ago that was not to be repeated? Moses was going to tell them (and us). It is ancient history, but it is oh, so relevant, because the same decision their parents failed to make, they would have a fresh chance to make, and you and I, having been faithful to make the spiritual switch, would have ample opportunity to face the same issues with the same choices, and with equally serious consequences, yea, with eternity at stake.

“You have dwelt in this state of nomadic obscurity long enough” said Moses. “You have wandered long enough”. God was going to give them another chance. Maybe their last one. He was going to offer them a fresh, new ticket across the mountain range

they had been wandering around for lo, this entire generation.

The children of Israel could have possessed the land some thirty-eight years before. To keep the timetable straight, it had taken them three months to reach Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egypt. They had remained there for a whole year (Numbers 10:11-12) and then proceeded to Kadesh-barnea. It was then and it was from there that the decision of decisions was made after the twelve spies had gone into Canaan to check it out. The spies were gone forty days. By then, it had been two years since they had left Egypt. It was, therefore, technically a thirty-eight year period of aimless wandering and ultimate death.

THE EXHORTATION

This present generation had been home schooled in the desert without what you would call a major library source. Hebrew history was taught by the parents to the children and the spiritual lessons were, no doubt, the punch line to the stories. Moses, however, in his closing addresses to the nation, wanted to be sure that the facts had been correctly communicated, so he went one more time back into the recent archives and reminded them of their parents' folly. It was a grievous story about a disastrous decision made using the wrong criteria for decision-making. Beginning with verse 18, he reminded them this way:

And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do.

And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us; and we came to Kadeshbarnea.

And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us.

Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up *and* possess *it*, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.

(Deuteronomy 1:18-21)

There was no excuse for their wrong choice. They had the clear word of God. And so do we. Most of our disastrous decisions come as a result, not of acting in ignorance, *but of acting in disobedience*. We have the completed canon of Scripture. Most of our decisions can be made strictly on the basis of the absolutes and principles of Scripture, provided that we a) know them and

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b) are willing to apply them. Moses was clear:

I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do.

No secrets. No hidden surprises. No “I wonder if’s....” Just “Here is the way. Walk ye in it.” And this was the clear word God had given them. They didn’t need an interpreter. They didn’t need a course in Hebrew grammar. They just needed to obey. Here was the word of God:

And I said unto you, Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the LORD our God doth give unto us.

Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up *and* possess *it*, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.

(Deuteronomy 1:20,21)

“God has given you a gift,” said Moses, those thirty-eight years before, “all you have to do is go up and possess it”. In other words, walk into the Bank of Heaven and withdraw the promise. It won’t be painful and God won’t make you feel presumptuous for asking. The principle was repeated many years later in James, chapter one:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

(James 1:5,6)

“Upbraideth not” means God won’t scold you for asking. And for what do you ask? You ask for God’s will according to Scripture.

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

(I John 5:14,15)

We make it so complicated. To pray aright and make right decisions, we simply need to know and obey the Word of God which is, simply put, *the will of God explained*. So the children of Israel knew what to do. They were to come into the land which God had already deeded over to Israel. They owned it. All they were being asked to do was inhabit their possession. They had to make several decisions:

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1- They had to accept the fact that it was a gift. Otherwise, they would have to first lay claim to it as something *they had decided they had to have, rather than something God had decided was already theirs.* This principle holds true for us today, as well. So long as we view the will of God as something we have to decide for God and impart to Him or convince Him of, we will never grasp the awesomeness of His sovereignty or His grace. All of life is a gift. And all of God's promises are gifts. We deserve *none of them.* He has, however, in love, *given them to us to possess.* Only when we see grace for what it is can we truly possess the promises of God.

2- They had to be willing to "go up" and face whatever warfare God allowed along the way as a necessary part of the process. One of the missing links in Christianity today may well be our inability or unwillingness to explain to young Christians that the "name it and claim it" philosophy is not God's way. We don't stay in the barracks with a Nintendo type remote control, manipulating God into giving us what we want, shooting down the enemy at will from the comfortable confines of our air conditioned game rooms. This thing we call "spiritual warfare" is not a game. It is a real battle between the only two spiritual powers in the universe: God and Satan. And from the moment we receive Christ, possessing forever His indwelling Holy Spirit, the battle begins full scale. Thirty-eight years before, the parents of this congregation looked at the land, liked what they saw, and wanted to possess it. Then they looked at the enemy, didn't like what they saw, and determined *that possessing the land was not worth the price they would have to pay to get it.*

They wanted the luscious fruit the land produced. They wanted to live on those fruitful plains. They wanted to enjoy the security of having their own land, their own homes, their own communities. But not if it meant warfare. So they opted for peace at any price and lost everything. Spiritual warfare, beloved, is a requirement for possessing the land. If you are not willing for God to give the enemy access to your life in order to prepare your heart for possession, *forget it.* You can't have one without the other.

3- They had to "possess" it. It had to be experiential. This was not some kind of doctrinal discussion group. It was an action group. They couldn't sit and argue the merits of the land or even the comparative benefits of either possessing it or not. Possession

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was ten-tenths of the law, and either they went in and “took it” or no matter how educated they were in the slope of the land, the fruit of the land and the giants in the land, they would be none the better. We have come to a place in the Christian community where we almost believe that more information equals spiritual growth. More seminars mean maturity. More sermons mean more victories. And we have lost the concept in many cases that all more information does is make us more accountable. If we are going to possess this “abundant life” God has promised us, *we are going to have to leave the confines of our comfortable classrooms and go out into the marketplace where the real world lives, and let God be Himself in us.* Otherwise, we can stay in the classroom all of our lives and never really experience life.

4- In order to possess it, they would have to believe God. The key phrase in this whole chapter is “fear not, neither be afraid”. As we shall see, there were enough natural reasons not to possess the land for it to be plain that only supernatural reasons would do. That is where God does His best work. Fear is the absence of faith. They had a word from God. Either they would believe Him without proof (that’s faith) or they would doubt and despair (that’s fear). Those were their two alternatives. And those are ours, as well.

THE HESITATION

ounds easy enough, doesn’t it? Well, so does the Christian life. The problem wasn’t with the *exhortation*, but with their *hesitation*. They wanted to redefine faith. Faith is the “evidence of things not seen”. They agreed to have faith, once they had seen for themselves that it was “no contest” with or without a miracle from God. Here was their plan to see that God didn’t embarrass Himself:

And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.

And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe:

And they turned and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out.

(Deuteronomy 1:22-24)

Don’t overlook that phrase: “every one of you”. It was a

unanimous recommendation. As we will see, running God's kingdom by majority rule usually doesn't work. The majority normally don't see things from God's perspective. They are willing for God to work, but on man's terms and man's ways. Though His ways are higher than ours, we act as though they are about two feet higher than His, rather than as much higher as heaven is above earth. That's why the requirements for spiritual leadership in the church are so stringent. The leaders are supposed to do what Moses did: explain the higher ways of God and challenge the people to follow. Given the choice without the instruction, the majority will always try to bring God down to man's terms rather than elevate man to God's terms.

Now what was wrong with their plan? Just this. *They wanted to be sure that the land and its inhabitants were "possessable" with or without a miracle.* That eliminated the need for faith entirely. They, like us, used human reasoning as a cover-up for their lack of faith. They said the reason they wanted to go and check it out was that they needed to find out what route to take and what cities they ought to take first. They wanted to do surveys and fill out forms. All they needed to do was ask God.

Now, don't be puzzled by Moses' response. As he explains it some thirty-eight years later, "the saying pleased me well". It literally means, "I was made glad by your proposal". I believe, based on the whole of the story, that Moses was pleased because he believed that:

- 1- When they saw the glory of what God had given them, they would be so in awe that any warfare involved in taking it would be worth it all, and
- 2- When they saw the size of the enemy, and the impossibility of the task, they would crawl up into their God and like David, who was to come, and Jesus, who was to come to earth, the more imposing the enemy, the more triumphant would be the victory.

It would be inconsistent for him to command them to "fear not" and be glad that they would enter in and let their fear consume them. He wanted them to see the impossibility of the situation, accompanied by the awesomeness of the ultimate conquest and be overcome with an overwhelming trust in God's ability to do the impossible.

They, however, didn't see it. They came back with the same

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two-edged report we give of the Christian life. They said this:

And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought *it* down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us.

Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God:

(Deuteronomy 1:25,26)

Perhaps the best response to that scenario would be “Uh-oh”. They not only *saw* the fruit of the land, they *tasted* the fruit of the land and they *took* some of the fruit of the land. They actually *experienced the benefits of possessing*. Theoretically, that ought to do it. But it didn’t. Instead of focusing the lens of their hearts on what God was offering them, they focused instead on the size and the intensity of the enemy He had allowed to live temporarily in the land.

In the process, they overlooked the fact that He had allowed them to live there so He could have the privilege of defeating them so His children could have the privilege of seeing their Mighty God at work. They missed the whole point of it.

So do we. Those divine interruptions in the “comfort zones” of life that God allows Satan to throw at us are His quiet invitations into the screening room of life to see a preview of the final victory that is on the horizon perhaps only minutes or days from now. One day soon, the heavens will open, The King will descend, and we will be with Him. The enemy will have unleashed all of his power on planet earth with the misguided assumption that once and for all, *as he had assumed at Calvary*, God’s forces were on the ropes. What will happen, however, is that in a split second the Word of God will utterly defeat the enemy and He will set up His kingdom at last.

Every scuffle in your life, then, is a preview of Armageddon. God wants to show you in miniature what is going to happen one day when the King assumes His rightful role as Ruler. He wants to rule the kingdom of your heart the way He will one day rule over all. To do that, He must allow the enemy *just enough rope to hang himself*, and He must allow us *just enough choice to decide whether we will embrace the conflict in order to enjoy the conquest, or run the other way and miss it all*.

When we flee the battlefield in disgust or dismay, we miss seeing the internal victory God was wanting to reveal in our hearts.

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When we curse the battle, we in essence curse the Commander-in-Chief who sent us into the fray in the first place, and we disgrace His Holy Name. No, the battles are not fun, beloved, but they were never meant to be. The battles are rather stepping stones to the victory celebration, and once again I remind you, “You can’t have victory in warfare unless you go up into the battlefield and let God fight for you.”

That was the missing ingredient Moses was describing these thirty-eight years after the fact, and it is the missing ingredient for so many of us today.

Listen and weep:

Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God:

And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.

Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people *is* greater and taller than we; the cities *are* great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

(Deuteronomy 1:25,26)

They faced the choice: Compare the enemy and his forces with your own ability to defeat him and crawl up into a fetal position and cry, our compare the enemy and his firepower with Your Great God and march into the battle shouting:

God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

Though the waters thereof roar *and* be troubled, *though* the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah

(Psalm 46:1-3)

Though the earth be removed and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea. One day that will happen. And we need not fear. The children of Israel had faced that choice a generation before and made a horrendous decision. It changed their lives. It changed their children’s lives. It changed the course of history. They decided that the cost of believing God was too high, and that they would rather simply wander aimlessly in life’s wilderness rather than paying the price to face the warfare that ultimately

would take them into the land.

The land *was* beautiful. But the cost, they surmised, was *too high*. There might be casualties. There might be pain. There might be blood shed. So rather than reporting for duty and preparing for victory, they chose to *murmur* instead. And by and large, the church in our generation has a Master's Degree in murmuring. We're never satisfied. We want more of everything. More buildings, more parking, more air conditioning, more programs, more performances, more activities, more opportunities. What we ought to want is more of God.

What we ought to want is to be conformed to His image at any price. What we ought to want is to be thrust into the battlefield of life so we can see our God at work when the bullets are whizzing past us at the speed of sound and the bombs are falling on every side. We ought to be so desirous that the lost be saved and the saved be transformed by the renewing of their minds that our only focus would be on *them*, not on *us and our convenience or our supposed needs*.

What we ought to be doing, then, is praying instead of murmuring. And what we ought to be praying is: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, no matter the cost." Jesus prayed that prayer and it cost Him everything, but in the process it gave us everything. Oh, that the church would return to God's perspective: that we are not here to become more comfortable. This is not where the kingdom is. We are here to become victorious, and we ought to be so focused on the conflict and the victory that will be ours that we don't have time to murmur.

They found time. They murmured. And what did their murmuring sound like? It sounded like a word from the pit itself. They said,

Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.
(Deuteronomy 1:27b)

I beg your pardon? They said what? They said "God doesn't love us. He is simply using us. He brought us out here to see us get clobbered. Woe is us." That, beloved, is why Moses spent so much time in this "second giving of the law" explaining the love of God. Their parents didn't understand love. They thought love meant "Never having to say, sorry.....this is what you need". They thought love meant getting what you want, not what you need,

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and getting it without any pain or pressure. That's not love, that's irresponsibility. In order to assume that posture, the children of Israel had to do three things:

1- They had to ignore the word of God. God had clearly told them He loved them. He had explained that He given them a land flowing with milk and honey, and that all they had to do was go up and possess it. To assume otherwise was to call God a liar. This they did, and beloved, *this we do as well.*

2- They had to attribute wrong motives to God. They had to say that God was tricking them in order to use them. Their welfare was not His main concern, they said. They were only pawns in the chess game of eternity, and they were expendable.

3- They had to put their focus on the enemy and his strength rather than on God and His deliverance. They cried:

Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people *is* greater and taller than we; the cities *are* great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

(Deuteronomy 1:28)

“These guys are too big for us.” Good observation. But they never asked the second question. “Are they too big for God?” They didn't ask the second question because by now they had assumed that God did not have their best interest at heart, and now *God became the enemy and the enemy became a non-issue.* So it was all over, and their itinerary for the next forty years or so was a given.

THE EXPLANATION

hat went wrong? They looked away from God long enough to become discouraged. Then they made a major decision while they were in that state of discouragement. They elected not to believe God and He had no choice but to let them live with the fruit of their wrong decision. They chose to wander. Oh, given the choice in those words, they might have hesitated. But their choice was simple. Believe God and take Him at His word, or wander aimlessly and come to the end of your journey *having taken a lot of steps but having taken no new territory.* You just did the same things over and over, and when problems arose, *you murmured.*

So at the end of your journey you find *you never really*

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possessed the land. Oh, you did a lot of walking. And a lot of talking. And you are still God's child. But what a waste. How many times you missed seeing the enemy fall in defeat. How many times you missed hearing God's call to battle. How many times you could have stood in the victory circle with the Savior while you were instead cowering in the barracks "playing" the Christianity game on your make-believe Nintendo. Discouraged hearts make bad decisions. And bad decisions make for an incomplete life.

I think some of us are standing even now where the children of Israel were standing on that fateful day. The land of God's promises is just a step of faith away. God has called us to some special calling or allowed us to endure some special trial. He wants us to enter the land and possess His nature in a way we have never experienced before. We have two choices: We can question His word and His motives and begin to murmur about the injustices of life...or... We can, once and for all, decide that there is more to life than wandering, and pray: "Lord, whatever it takes, take me into the land."

If you make that decision, hold on to your hats, the journey may not be on an air-conditioned Greyhound. That's okay. When you get to your final destination, air-conditioning won't even be needed. Until then, though, ask God to take you *any way He chooses*. He may take you through valleys dark when you have nothing to hold onto but a nail-scarred hand. Fear not. Those are His words. That hand has been there before. He will see you through. Or He may lead into hand to hand combat with the enemy; combat so fierce you may be entertaining thoughts of hightailing it back to camp where you can seek out one of those Christian hiding places and stay out of sight until that final roll call. Or He may lead you into some rich ministry that can only flow out of wells that have been dug through deep rock or rivers that have been allowed to run dry. He may. Or He may simply, quietly put His loving arms around you and lead you into the prayer closet ... And leave you there. It doesn't matter. All that matters is that when faced with that one single life-affecting decision: you heard the voice of Moses point you towards the land and say:

The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you,...

(Deuteronomy 1:30)

And you said, "Praise God, I'll go."

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For Further Study and Application

1- What ways does Satan most often use successfully in your life to discourage you? Health problems? Child problems? Marriage problems? Spiritual apathy? Relational problems? Rejection? Persecution?

2- When you are down emotionally are you prone to make decisions? Do you find later that you often made wrong decisions?

3- How would you describe a life of wandering? Do you know people who have wandered through life without any real sense of purpose or goal? What can be said of their legacy?

4- Making the spiritual switch, why is it so many people can be so focused where their careers are concerned, or their marriage is concerned, or their hobbies are concerned, and yet seem so to wander in their spiritual walk? How can being so focused in other areas cause you to let your guard down spiritually?

5- Study Deuteronomy 1:18 carefully. Consider every word. Has God ever said that to you? Think about your answer. Of course He has. Now, *what has been your response?*

6- Why do you think God always seemed to make warfare a prerequisite for claiming victory? Why do we so fight that fact in our spiritual lives?

7- What is the difference between knowing the promises and claiming the promises?

8- The children of Israel actually tasted the fruit of the land and took some home for “show and tell”. Why, then, did they fail to possess that which they knew produced such fruit?

9- Memorize Deuteronomy 1:30.

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