

OVERCOMER SERIES



August – November 2020

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OVERCOMER (New Series)

John 16:33 - *"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."*

I don't think God desires for us to be continually overwhelmed in life; He desires for us to be overcomers in life. That doesn't mean we are going to have a problem-free life ... if you want that message, you should probably listen to Joel Osteen in the morning! But I believe we can rise above our circumstances **because of** Jesus Christ.

Sometimes it seems as though the things that we're up against are undefeatable; they seem like giants in our life and there's no possible way we can overcome that. There's a story in **Numbers Chapter 13-14** ... we see Moses having sent 12 spies (two of which were Joshua and Caleb), returning and bringing back a report to Moses ...

Numbers 13:27-30 - *"And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this [is] the fruit of it. ²⁸ Nevertheless the people [be] strong that dwell in the land, and the cities [are] walled, [and] very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. ³⁰ And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."*

Whatever obstacle in your life, you are able, with God's help, to overcome it. You no longer have to live a life of discouragement and defeat. You can overcome the giants in your land.

In this story, we're going to see 3 key truths that we need to grasp on this series of being an overcomer. We've got to understand these things before we can do that. Let's keep reading ...

Numbers 14:1-8 - *"And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. ² And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! ³ And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? ⁴ And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. ⁵ Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. ⁶ And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, [which were] of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: ⁷ And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, [is] an exceeding good land. ⁸ If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey."*

The Israelites are feeling overwhelmed by their circumstances. They start to complain and cast blame on Moses and Aaron, and ultimately blaming God. Sometimes we get to that place. They were slaves in Egypt! They're about to quit on God's mission and purpose for their life. Maybe you've been there, where you're crying out to God and blaming other people. They're looking for a new leader; they're about to quit on God's purpose and mission for their lives. We need to remember that God will bring us into the land; He will help us win.

1. We are overcomers because Jesus has overcome.

Our capacity to be an overcomer is because Jesus has overcome. Ultimately the battle is the Lord's. There is no victory without Jesus Christ. Because of His resurrection, we can have victory *in* and *through* Jesus.

John 16:33 - *"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."*

Romans 8:37 - *"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."*

Our theme verse says something similar. **2Corinthians 2:14a** - *"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ,..."*

We can overcome because **He** has overcome! We must fight our battles from a place of victory, understanding that the fight has already been won. This changes everything! We have the victory and we must approach life from the stance of being victorious. Sometimes we forget that.

January of this year, our beloved Chiefs were in the divisional round of the playoffs and found themselves in a 24-0 hole. Fans might have been a bit pessimistic about how it was going to turn out! As the score continued to mount, I found myself thinking, 'Here we go again!' Most people would have thought there was no chance for a comeback but then the deficit started to erase, didn't it? By half of the game, they started to gain ... and they went on to victory, didn't they? If you go back and watch it, you don't feel so bad about the opponents scoring because you know we won. On the other side of it, we have the knowledge of the victory and we have perspective. Through Christ, we have the victory already! It changes the way we look at life. We win because God wins! But you've got to be in Christ, it's only through Christ. It's not about **our** strength or power ... it's about HIS.

Numbers 14:8-9 - *"If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. ⁹ Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they [are] bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD [is] with us: fear them not."*

The Lord is with us.

2. We are overcomers because Jesus is with us.

God's going to do it through us. He is with us. When we're facing our giant obstacles, it can feel very lonely and frightening. We need to understand we're never alone. If you are a child of God, He is with you. God lives in you through His Holy Spirit.

1John 4:4 - *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”*

"them" is the spirits of antichrist. We can overcome because Jesus has overcome. In us is the Holy Spirit of God. We can overcome because Jesus is with us. The obstacles are mostly an interior thing, within us. Oftentimes He's using that circumstance, that emotion, to do that very work. **He** is greater than any physical or emotional obstacle you'll ever face in life. He is more powerful and He lives in you, believer!

We tend to shy away from God's Holy Spirit. That's the worst thing you can ever do!

1Corinthians 6:19 - *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”*

Colossians 1:27 - *“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:”*

I love powerful things ... horsepower ... I don't know how powerful a horse is, but you need a car that has a lot of it! maybe a boat! You have the most powerful thing in the universe living in you! You don't get two verses into Scripture that you see God's spirit creating, moving. The God that created the cosmos lives in you! We cannot grasp the size of the universe ... and He spoke it into existence ... He Who lives in you!

Genesis 1:2 - *“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”*

Luke 1:35 - *“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”*

"power" is in reference to the Holy Ghost.

Romans 8:11 - *“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”*

It's this Holy Spirit power that actually raised up Jesus from the dead ... and He dwells in you! That's power! Resurrection power, creation power, the power of the highest lives in you, believer! Do you think He's not able to handle whatever you're facing in life? He's got it! We oftentimes don't allow Him to do it. God doesn't have limited capacity ... he can handle it! Small or large, He's got it. The power that lives within us is more than sufficient to allow us to overcome whatever we're facing in life.

Numbers 13:30-33 - *“And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. ³¹ But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they [are] stronger than we. ³² And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, [is] a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it [are] men of a great stature. ³³ And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak,*

[which come] of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."

Here's the problem with the 10 spies ... they're operating solely based upon what they see. They saw the sons of Anak, the giants, and felt like grasshoppers in their sight. We as believers need to operate on faith. We are overcomers because we have faith in Jesus!

3. We are overcomers because we have faith in Jesus

1John 5:4-5 - *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"*

That's true in salvation ... trusting Jesus to save you. It's our faith in what He did that saves us. Why do we trust him with our soul for all of eternity but we're unwilling to trust Him in that thing that is giving us trouble? Our faith must be based on a promise from God ... and His Word is filled with promises.

Romans 4:19-21 (faith defined) - *"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: ²⁰ He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ²¹ And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform."*

This whole passage is about Abraham, the father of all faith. Abraham gets a promise from God -- a child, Isaac ... and nations are going to come from that promise. He is 99 years old! Sarah is 90, well past child-bearing years! He considered not his own body dead or the deadness of Sarah's womb ... he's considering how powerful God is. We can't base our overcoming in our own ability; we can't look at ourself and say 'I can't do this' ... we have to base it on the promises of God's Word.

Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Believe what God says about you, believe what God says about Himself. Have faith that it's true! If it was good enough for your salvation, it's good enough for your circumstance. Start living from the place of victory. We are not alone. Tap into the power of God within you! We are overcomers because we have faith in Jesus and His ability to give us what we need to overcome.

I'm looking forward to the victories that God is going to bring into our lives.

Three things --

1. There is no victory outside of Christ. If you're not saved, you're not getting victory. You have to be in Christ. It's only through Christ we can have victory.
2. Believers, begin praying that God would increase your faith, increase your capacity to believe Him. Pray and ask God to help your unbelief!
3. Invite somebody to come with you to this series, in person or online. I don't want what we're going through as a country to inhibit our ability to reach others. Let's be a blessing to people and help them to overcome what they're dealing with.

<http://www.gracebaptists.com>

† *Father, we come into Your presence and ask You to please help us to grow in faith. We want to be able to trust You more and more every day. Help us to believe the promises of Your Word, to trust that You are able to help us to overcome whatever we're facing in life. We pray for victories in people's lives. Help us to take the truths of Your Word and apply them to our situation. Give us the ability to trust the truth of Your Word over our emotions or thoughts. We are thankful for Your Word and the promises it contains to help us live more abundantly for Your glory.*

Help us encourage others to come along with us. We ask all of this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

The preceding notes were taken from a sermon by Brad Nelson, Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Lee's Summit, Missouri. The notes are in no way endorsed by Pastor Nelson, but are shared for the benefit of furthering God's kingdom. Feel free to share with anyone you are led by the Spirit to do so. Any errors or discrepancies contained in this document, although not intended, are those of the transcriber.



Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtdmJcyl5wg>

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This year's vision theme and verse -- **PRAYER, Praying together and living the victorious Christian life**



2Corinthians 2:14 - *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.”*

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Overcoming Hopelessness

Hope is not found in material things, in others, in a political party. Hope is found in God Almighty, the God of Hope, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, When we stop looking unto Jesus and we start to look at our circumstances or the behaviour of other people, we find ourselves discouraged, in despair and even hopeless. We have hope because we serve the God of hope. We are no longer looking at the problem, but the problem-solver. When we find ourselves in that place of discouragement, we need to make sure our eyes are where they need to be.

Romans 15:13 - *“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”*

The God of Hope

Psalms 31:24 - *“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.”*

When our hope is centered in the proper place, that brings courage. When our hope starts to wane, we become fearful. When our hope is in the Lord, it brings courage with it; it strengthens our heart. When God is our hope, He will come and strengthen our heart.

Psalms 146:5 - *“Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:”*

We all want to be happy. Where do we find that happiness? We find it when our hope is in the Lord. He has to be the source of our hope. If your situation looks hopeless, from God's perspective there is hope. The things that seem to be most hopeless, that's when the God of hope works His best. Think about the cross, how hopeless it looked from the perspective of the followers of Jesus. The source of hope is the God of hope.

Joy and peace in believing ... believing what? Believing in the God of hope and believing in the Scripture of hope. Our faith is not baseless, it's not directed at nothingness. Faith is founded in truth; faith is directed at substance. We believe that the God of hope is at work and He's going to get us through, that He's doing what is best for us. But faith is also directed at the truth of hope -

Scriptures. We have to look into the Word of God and glean hope from His work. ***Our belief must be based in the truth of God's Word.***

The Scriptures of Hope

Romans 15:4 - *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

He's talking about the Old Testament. Look back into those pages, which are written for our learning. How do we find hope? When we keep our eyes on the God of hope and we turn to the Scriptures of hope ... and through patience, we learn. Endurance, persevere. By His Holy Scriptures, we have hope. What God's Word says takes precedence over how we feel. Our emotions have a lot of flesh mixed in with them. Our perspective needs to come from God's Word.

Psalms 119:81-83 - *“My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word. 82 Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me? 83 For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.”*

"Salvation" means "deliverance" here in **Psalms 119:81**. Hope in thy Word. The psalmist is talking about being in a situation that God would come through and deliver him. He's all dried up, and says, 'yet I don't forget thy statutes.' We talk about having a personal relationship with God ... this Book is the most powerful thing you own. It can change your life, and most importantly, it can change you!

If something is wrong with your car, you take it to a mechanic to fix. Most of you looked in the mirror before you came to church this morning, assessing the damage from last night! The mirror is a truth-teller, isn't it? It gives you an accurate portrayal of what you're up against. The Scriptures are like a mirror ... it tells you what the problem is. Oftentimes the problem is looking right back at you. Ignoring the problem provides no hope. The Word of God provides a plan to get back on track. God gives you promises to hold on to. As God speaks to you from His Word, He gives you promises to cling to. It shows us the problem, it provides us a plan and gives us promises to hold onto. It also changes our perspective. It reminds us how large God is.

How does God's word bring hope? His Word ...

- shows us where we have a **problem**
- provides a **plan** to get back on track
- gives us a **promise** to hold onto
- changes our perspective
- reminds us there's a purpose

There is a **purpose** from God. We need to recognize the source of hope = the God of hope.

The Spirit of Hope

Inevitably, we're going to face things in life that are beyond our ability. It looks hopeless from a natural perspective. We need something supernatural, the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to trust that God and His Spirit are able to bring us hope and encourage us. We underestimate the power of God's Spirit. We are carnal. We rely more on our flesh than on the Spirit of God. We should trust in God's Spirit to work through us. **Walk in the power of God's Spirit!**

The Holy Spirit brings hope because...

- He brings **life** to dead situations. **Romans 1:4** - *“And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:”*

Jesus Christ was raised by the **power** of God's Spirit. His Spirit raised us from the dead when we received Jesus as Saviour. He brings life to dead situations!

- He gives **strength** to the weak. **Ephesians 3:16** - *“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;”*

Strength by His Spirit in the inner man, strength that is internal, Spirit-driven and supernatural. When we feel overwhelmed, God can give you the strength when you don't have it. When I am weak, He is strong. God will sometimes bring you to that place to show you His strength.

- He **comforts** the afflicted. **John 14:16-17** - *“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; ¹⁷ [Even] the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”*

He comforts us when we're afflicted. In order to be comforted, you have to be uncomfortable. That's when He does His work.

- He **intercedes** on our behalf. **Romans 8:26** - *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

Ever been there? You don't even know what to pray for? The Spirit of God knows and intercedes for us. He knows exactly what we need.

- He **guides** you to truth. **John 16:13** - *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”*

When we don't know what to do, our first inclination is to call somebody ... a friend, parent, pastor ... How about tapping into God's Spirit first? *“Spirit of God, teach me. Show me what I should do. Lead me to the truth.”* God brings hope to hopeless situations because He is the God of hope. ***Inside of us is the Spirit of hope!***

Romans 5:1-5 - *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”*

We are justified by faith, ***faith what Jesus did on the cross***. [Not our faith, but Jesus' faith.] As a result of that, we have peace with God. Before, we were at odds with God, we needed to be reconciled to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Your salvation is so important and it impacts more than your eternity ... it impacts your existence now*. Nothing will change the fact that if you genuinely put your faith in Christ, you will someday go to heaven.

We glory in tribulations (Verse 3). Paul is looking at his situation, the hopeless thing he's up against, and he's saying, 'I'm glorying in this tribulation.' What gives him the ability to do that? Knowing that tribulation works patience. If we don't quit, if we endure, tribulation works patience.

Experience means proven character. Tribulation works patience, it works experience. It proves character. When we go through trials and God works in us and we endure, it proves our character. Then guess what we have? We have hope .. that God is real, that His Word is true. God becomes more real through that process. His love is shed abroad through that hope. God loves us and He's going to help us through.

Whatever we're up against in life, there's a purpose. God is doing a work. Would to God that we could get to the place where Paul is, where we glory in our tribulations! He's given us the Scripture of hope and the Spirit of God. God wants us to have a more intimate knowledge of Him.

Ephesians 2:12 - *“That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”*

Why no hope? Without God in the world. There is no hope without Jesus Christ. **1 Peter 1:3** - *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”* **Titus 2:13** - *“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;”*

He's coming back someday!. There are 2 things we ought to look to:

1. The hope of your salvation. Walk in the power of that hope, no matter what happens.
2. The Second Coming, a future event. He's coming back! He's going to return ... look for that blessed hope, the return of Jesus Christ.

When circumstances look bad, we know we have hope in Christ. Believers are in Christ and we are not without God.

This world is broken and it's not going to get any better. If you're waiting for that, good luck! But we can have hope in Christ, even in the darkness. That love of God can shine abroad in our hearts even though our circumstances aren't what we hope they would be.

If you are without Christ, it doesn't have to be that way. You can be saved today. All of humanity were without Christ, but God sent His Son, the Word of God. His Spirit of hope does a work in us and gives us life, a work that we could not do for ourselves. ([Romans 10:9-10](#), [Ephesians 2:8-9](#), [Romans 6:23](#), [Romans 3:23](#))

Though our situation seems dire, we have hope in Christ. Are you walking in the power of the Spirit of hope? He's given us the resources we need to abound in hope.

† *Father, we come into Your presence asking that You would help us to keep our eyes firmly focused on You. We pray that we would turn to Your Word and find hope in the Scriptures; that we would crucify our flesh and be filled with the power of Your Holy Spirit. We pray that You would help us as Your followers, as Your children, to always remain hopeful and to glory in our tribulations. Thank You for Your Word and the hope it gives us.*

We ask all of this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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Overcoming Anger

We all struggle with anger at some point in our lives. Some of us are yellers, some express our anger physically. We see that in the world all the time ... violence. Sometimes we are so mad we express it in the form of tears. Sometimes anger just gets quiet. Anger is not always visible to us, it's not always on display in the exterior (shouting or physical contact), sometimes it's internal. Sometimes we just withdraw. Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus says:

Ephesians 4:26-27 - *“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 Neither give place to the devil.”*

Displeasure causes a tension to grow in us and to have an attitude of hostility toward an offender. It builds up and we develop an attitude than can become hostile.

Anger is not sin.

It is possible to be angry but not go to that sinful place. God has instilled in us this emotion of anger. What we do with it is a different issue.

Anger in itself is not sin.

“Be ye angry, and sin not:...”

Deuteronomy 9:18-19 - *“And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. 19 For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you. But the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also.”*

The sinful nature of Israel provoked God to anger.

Psalms 7:11 - *“God judgeth the righteous, And God is angry with the wicked every day.”*

God's anger is always directed at sin or sinful behaviour. God is sometimes angry. He hates sin but He doesn't hate it sinfully. In other words, sin never causes Him to cross over that line to sinfulness. Jesus, our Saviour, got angry. Look at **Mark Chapter 3 --**

Mark 3:4-5 - *“And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. 5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.”*

Jesus, in dealing with the Pharisees, sometimes was angry because of the hardness of their heart.

In **John Chapter 2**, Jesus fashioned a whip and drove the changers of money out of the temple. His anger was directed at sin, and was most often directed at the hypocrisy of the leaders in the nation of Israel. He had no tolerance for religious hypocrisy.

Jesus was never angry because of His own circumstances or His personal situation ... it wasn't about Him. It wasn't because He was personally confronted or inconvenienced in some way. It was always directed at people's spiritual condition.

Anger is intended to be constructive.

God gave us the emotion, but it's intended to resolve or improve a situation. That anger is stirred in us with the intention of causing us to do something about the situation. Most often in our lives, we get angry because we get inconvenienced. Anger isn't the problem, it's what we do with it that becomes the problem.

John 2:16-17 - *“And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. ¹⁷ And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.”*

Hebrews 4:15 - *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”*

Anger can lead us to a place of sinfulness.

We can cross a line while we're angry, into sin. If we're honest, this is most often what happens when we get angry ... it leads us somewhere where we ought not to be.

Who remembers the old TV show, *'The Incredible Hulk?'* At the time, it was the greatest thing! Bill Bixby was Dr. Banner and Lou Ferrigno was the Hulk. The introduction to the show showed clips of what happened to Dr. Banner. He said, 'You're making me angry, and you wouldn't like me when I'm angry.' Anger draws us to a place of sinfulness. It's driven by our own selfishness or pride, when we're not happy with our circumstances or personal situation. Here's an example of this --

Jonah was a prophet of God that was called to deliver a message to the city of Nineveh. He didn't want to go so he runs away, was eaten by a fish, was vomited out 3 days later, and then he went anyway! The people of Nineveh ended up repenting and then God turns from destroying the city. Jonah's response is --

Jonah 4:1-4 - *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. ² And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, [was] not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou [art] a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. ³ Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for [it is] better for me to die than to live. ⁴ Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?"*

Here's a prophet of God who preached a message to the sinners and when they repented, Jonah was mad because they weren't going to be punished. He knew the Lord was merciful and Jonah wanted them destroyed.

Jonah 4:9 - *"And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death."*

Jonah had more compassion for the gourd than the people of Nineveh! When we lose control of our anger, it can push us to a foolish place and cause us to do and say foolish things. Has anyone here said or done something that you regret?

Our anger causes us to move to a foolish place.

Proverbs 14:29 - *"He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly."*

When our anger causes us to do harm to someone else or desire to see harm done, we go to that foolish place.

Genesis 4:5-8 - *"But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. ⁶ And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? ⁷ If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee [shall be] his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. ⁸ And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."*

Cain and Abel ... their offerings to the Lord ... Cain is being disobedient. God doesn't respect Cain's offering of fruit because of the curse of the ground ([Genesis 3:17](#)). God tried to deal with Cain about his sin but he didn't do the right thing and crossed into the place of sinfulness, killing his own brother. Cain let the sun go down upon his wrath and didn't deal with his issue. In the stories of Jonah and Cain, Jonah said that he was angry at his situation; Cain was angry because his sacrifice wasn't good enough but his brother's was. In both circumstances, they were mad at God.

We get angry at God because things aren't going the way we think they should go. When a loved one passes away and we were on our knees praying for them but God takes them anyway, it's real easy to get upset over that. When we've been praying for a new job or a spouse and God doesn't answer the way we want Him to, we get angry. Our attitude is, 'I can run this world better than God can; or I don't know if you understand the situation, God.' We think God isn't doing the job we think He should do and we get angry, because He's not fixing our problem the way we think He should.

Anger can be controlled and overcome.

Ephesians 4:26-27 - *“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 Neither give place to the devil.”*

That's a commandment. He doesn't give us commandments over something we can't do. You can't blame sin on a character quality. If we don't handle our anger correctly, we give place to the devil in our life. We give him a foothold, saying, 'Come on in and destroy me. Come on in, devil, have your way.'

We don't have to go to that place of sinfulness. How?

- **Walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh.**

Believers have a new nature. The Holy Spirit of God lives within you. Someone cuts us off in traffic, it pushes our buttons! But if we're in the Spirit, we have a fighting chance to deal with the anger correctly.

Ephesians 4:30-31 - *"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:"*

Put away all malice.

Ephesians Chapter 4 is about putting off the old man and putting on the new character of Christ. If we're going to deal with our anger the way God would have us to, we have to put on the character of Christ.

- **Deal with your anger quickly.**

Not dealing with anger makes it fester and grow, and can make us bitter. Don't go to bed mad. Work it out, deal with it. Confess it, talk with somebody, but don't just let it sit. You can't sweep it under the rug and think it will all be better tomorrow. No! You can't stack it. It will blow up.

- **Be honest about the occasion of your anger.**

This is a struggle for many believers. We're not very honest with ourselves. Is my feeling justified and righteous? or is it selfish? Is this my flesh or is this a righteous indignation? Identify the real cause of your anger.

- **Avoid angry people.**

That might include watching them on TV or reading about it.

James 1:19-21 - *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: ²⁰ For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. ²¹ Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."*

Ephesians 4:26 - *"...let not the sun go down upon your wrath."*

Proverbs 22:24-25 - *"Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: ²⁵ Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."*

Avoid angry people. We're all angry at times, but if there's a person in your life that's always fired up about something, that impacts you! It makes you angry!

- **Let God be God.**

Oftentimes when we're angry, we're going to exact judgment on a situation instead of letting God be God. He says, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' ([Romans 12:19](#)) Oftentimes, it is a faith issue. 'I knew you were kind and going to let them off the hook ...' Let Him be God! Praise Him for the mercy in your life. **How many times has He let you off the hook?**

The comedian George Carlin used to say, 'When you're on the highway, everybody that's going slower than you is an idiot and everybody that's going faster than you is a maniac!' Let God be God!

- **Channel your righteous anger (not selfish anger) at your circumstances.**

Anger is to propel me to action; to cause me to do something. When I see a homeless person or little kids living on the street and it's not their fault, it stirs my heart, it makes me angry. I can ignore it or do something about it. I'm going to be a blessing and do what I can do.

Righteous anger is intended to spur you to action.

There's a famous quote by Matthew Henry - "If we would be angry and not sin (says one), we must be angry at nothing but sin; and we should be more jealous for the glory of God than for any interest or reputation of our own."

Most times, when I'm angry, it's about me ... my selfishness, my pride, my will not being done. It's not a righteous anger, it's a selfish anger. If we don't deal with it properly, it can push us to a place of sinfulness.

Psalms 37:5-9 - "*Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring [it] to pass. ⁶ And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. ⁷ Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. ⁸ Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. ⁹ For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.*"

Psalms 7:11 - "*God judgeth the righteous, And God is angry with the wicked every day.*"

Outside of Christ, in our sinful state, we are under the anger and wrath of God. The good news is, Jesus came and He drank the cup of God's wrath. He took the wrath of God upon Himself that was intended for us, as sinful humans. When we're in Him through salvation, we don't have to fear God's wrath anymore. If we're not saved and die in that condition, then we will spend all eternity subject to the wrath of God in the lake of fire. Serious business! Jesus came for taking that wrath. He died so that we could live. But we've got to receive Him as Saviour.

Believers, undoubtedly there is someone here this morning that is angry at God. Maybe you wouldn't say it out loud, but you're mad at God because your circumstances haven't turned out the way you wanted them to. That's not a healthy place to live; it leads us to a destructive place, like it did in the life of Cain. You need to deal with that. Maybe you're angry towards someone or some circumstance you're up against. Again, we have to not allow that anger to push us to a place of sinfulness but deal with it appropriately. **Ask God to give you victory over it.**

It's only through Christ that we can be delivered from the anger and wrath of God. Admit you're a sinner and you need a Saviour, believe on the name of the Son of God, and confess Him as Saviour and call upon the name of Jesus to save you! If you don't want to spend eternity in hell under the wrath of God, admit you're a sinner, believe Jesus died for your sins and confess Him as your Saviour by calling upon the name of Jesus to save you.

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† *Father, we come to You this morning, knowing we all face things in life that cause us to become angry. Most oftentimes it's our own selfishness that draws us to a sinful place. Help us to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. I pray we would be more concerned with Your glory than our glory and that we would allow that righteous anger to propel us to action, to do something.*

We see so many things around us in the world that sin has destroyed. You've left us here not to just sit by and watch it, but to minister to people, to show them the love of Jesus and tell them about the gospel that can save their soul and change their life. I pray that we would be about Your business. We love You and are so appreciative of all the blessings You give us. Give us the tools we need to battle anger.

We ask all of this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUVcTh-IIRU>

Overcoming Bitterness

Hebrews 12:15 - *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;”*

My yard is looking good, then an old faithful friend starts to pop up ... the dandelion. "Dandelion" means "lion's tooth", which is interesting, given the topic we're going to talk about today. But dandelions are annoying! As a kid, you'd pick them and blow them and all the seeds would come off. The seeds go everywhere and they grow everywhere! It just takes a little bit of soil and out comes the lion's tooth. It's a vicious cycle, isn't it? Grass and dandelions are an illustration for what we're going to talk about this morning ... overcoming bitterness.

We all know someone that we would describe as bitter, mad at the world, upset all of the time. There are a number of things that can cause that. But the anger turns into bitterness. It doesn't happen overnight, it's a process. It is damaging to our spiritual vitality. Bitterness can do damage to our spiritual life. What are the seeds of bitterness?

Reasons for Bitterness

Resentment

I become resentful when things don't turn out the way I wanted them to turn out. It can be driven by envy. **James 3:14** talks about that bitter envy that we can have in our heart. I'm jealous and envious about what's going good in your life and it's not happening to me. It is driven by a selfish desire to have things my way. As a result, I get mad at God when things don't go the way I want them to, or I get mad at somebody else for hindering my progress.

In the **Book of Ruth**, Naomi and Ruth, her daughter-in-law, are returning from Moab to Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:19-22 - *“So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? 20And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? 22So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.”*

As they come back into Bethlehem and people see them, Naomi said, 'Don't call me Naomi' (which means "pleasant"), 'call me Mara' (which means "bitter"). Notice that she's blaming the events in her life on her bitterness. She left Bethlehem in a time of famine; they moved to Moab and while there, her husband and two sons die and she's left alone with her two daughters-in-law and returns to Bethlehem. Ruth comes with her, but when they arrive, Naomi is no longer pleasant, she's bitter.

Notice who she's blaming for her problems -- God -- in **Verse 21**. She's resentful toward her circumstances and is bitter. She is ultimately blaming God for this problem. Resentment toward God comes from the belief that God doesn't care about you or your circumstance. Sometimes it's easy to feel that way, that God is mad at you. We start to blame God or others. That's a lie from the devil. The devil uses that tactic at the beginning with Adam and Eve, that God is holding them back in some way.

Unforgiving Spirit

When we harbor ill-will and aren't willing to forgive others, that unforgiving spirit can turn and give root to bitterness in our lives. We become bitter because we've been wronged. All of our lives are filled with disappointment and people wronging us. We have disappointed and wrong others, too. If we're unwilling to extend forgiveness, that seed takes root in our life and turns into bitterness. Before you know it, we're yelling at people and telling them to get off our grass ... we become that bitter old person. You can always do what is right, but sometimes you just choose not to. God doesn't ask us to do something that we're not capable of doing. Sometimes we need to do things we don't want to. We need to forgive people that have wronged us.

THE RESULTS OF BITTERNESS

Stifled spiritual life

Do you feel like you're stuck, not growing, in your spiritual life? it could be that there's a root of bitterness in your heart that's stifling your walk with God.

Ephesians 4:30-31 - *“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”*

Paul warns us that we are capable of grieving the Spirit of God. It's a big deal to grieve God's Spirit! The Holy Spirit of God is the change agent in your life. He's The One that intercedes for you, comforts you, convicts you, gives you that peace that passes understanding ... and when He's grieved, you're not experiencing those things. If we've become resentful towards someone else or God, our spiritual life is going nowhere.

There's nothing more important than your spiritual life and your walk with God.

Not only does bitterness damage our relationship with God, but it damages other relationships too.

Damaged Relationships

Hebrews 12:15 - *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;”*

This passage tells us that not only does the root of bitterness in us trouble us, it impacts others in our life. When we allow that root of bitterness to take control, it trouble us and makes us into something we don't want to be. "Many be defiled" ... when I have a root of bitterness in my heart, it affects many people.

All of us have lashed out at someone that had nothing to do with the problem we were experiencing. That is the root of bitterness.

Irrational thoughts and behaviour

Genesis 27:34 - *“And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.”*

Genesis 27:41 - *“And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.”*

Esau is bitter because Jacob stole his birthright. He's upset with his Dad for blessing Jacob over him. He's bitter and crying out ... and in **Verse 41**, Esau starts to think about his dad dying and killing his brother.

In **Job Chapter 3**, Job is regretting the fact that he was ever born. Outbursts of anger and cutting words are associated with bitterness.

Psalms 64:3 - *“Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words:”*

Romans 3:14 - *“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:”*

Job 7:11 - *“Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”*

Bitterness is also found in complaining. If you find yourself continually complaining, it could be related to bitterness.

Physical Symptoms

There is a weight associated with bitterness. In the story of Ruth, Naomi didn't look the way she did when she left Moab. Bitterness impacts our physical well-being. It's a huge deal!

All these things are just symptoms of the real problem. If you have dandelions in your yard, you might be tempted to walk over and pop the head off that yellow flower. If there are so many, you mow them down, but guess what happens? They come right back because you haven't dealt with the *issue*, you only treated the *symptom*.

THE REMEDY FOR BITTERNESS

Hebrews 12:15 - *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;”*

It's no coincidence that the writer of **Hebrews** (which I believe is Paul) says it's a *root of bitterness*. We can't overcome the dandelion by dealing with the symptom, we have to deal with the root. Notice how the verse begins -- *looking diligently* -- some advice to be diligent about taking care of the root of bitterness in your heart.

Faith

Faith believes that a sovereign God cares and that He wants what is best for me. There are difficulties we go through and we don't know why, but in those moments we trust in the character and goodness of God, knowing He has our best interest in mind.

Romans 8:28 - *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

That verse doesn't say all things are good, it says things *work together for good*. There are things that happen to us that aren't good but we serve a God that works all things together for good because we have faith in Him. Take personal responsibility for your choices.

Look at **Ruth 1:1** and you will see it was her husband's choice to leave Bethlehem. God didn't make them leave. It was difficult there, but they left and went to Moab. Bethlehem means "house of bread". We tend to make our choices and then we fret against God. Faith involves you and I owning it, recognizing that some of our problems are because of our own bad decisions. It's not God's fault, it's ours. It helps us recognize that life is short and filled with trials. The world is broken, in sin, cursed. We are sinners! As a result of that, we're going to experience trials and tribulations. People are going to wrong us. Don't become bitter but rest in the goodness of God. Naomi came to realize this. King David ... and Jesus ... came from the lineage of Ruth. God was at work when she was sitting there in her bitterness.

Sometimes the things we go through in life aren't about us, they're about somebody else; about God showing Himself through our trials. We think it's about us but it might be so we can be a witness and testimony to someone else. It requires faith.

Forgiveness

Ask God for forgiveness for your bitterness and also be willing to extend forgiveness.

I forgive because I'm forgiven.

How hypocritical to accept and receive forgiveness from God but not be willing to extend that to somebody else.

Forgiveness is the key that
unlocks the door of
resentment and the
handcuffs of hate. It is a
power that breaks the
chains of bitterness and
the shackles of
selfishness.

Ephesians 4:31-32 - "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

God never asks us to do something He's not willing to do Himself. If you want to get rid of bitterness, be willing to forgive. Most of us have been betrayed or our trust violated. Neglected, abused, cheated-on, lied-to. Maybe you buried that deep down, but that seed takes root and becomes a root of bitterness. It's time to dig up the root; get rid of that root and to forgive! In reality, when we harbor an unforgiving spirit toward someone, we're only hurting ourselves. We don't want them to get away with it, but the only person we end up hurting in that equation is ourselves. Release that person and release yourself from the bond of bitterness. That's hard, but that's why **Hebrews 12:15** talks about we need a little grace from God. We need His help to enable us to forgive.

CHALLENGE: First, diligently search your heart for any root of bitterness. Invite God to come in and search your heart. Secondly, dig up any roots of bitterness that you find. Don't let the seed of resentment take root in your life. Dig up that root and replace your resentment with faith, knowing that there's a plan of God at work in your life. Even when we can't grasp why God would allow something to happen in our life, have faith in His goodness and don't be resentful. Finally, **forgive**. There are people that have been hurt deeply, and it's not easy, but forgive those people who have wronged you and let it go.

There's a story about General Robert E. Lee, after the civil war. He was visiting a woman in Kentucky and she showed him the remains of this grand old tree that had been destroyed. As she's showing him this, she is looking for sympathy for her loss. After a brief moment of silence, General Lee told her to cut it down and get rid of it. It's better to get rid of that thing causing bitterness than to let it grow. The longer we leave it there, the harder it is to get rid of it.

I encourage you and challenge you to be people of faith, willing to forgive **because you are forgiven**.

[How do we experience the forgiveness of God in our lives?](#) (Click for more info)

† *Father, we struggle with the things of bitterness. These are real issues in our hearts but we are not overcome ... we have victory through Christ! We leave here rejoicing in the fact that we have the victory in Jesus Christ. We pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †*

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Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2hpHfQrOak

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

Often in David's life he was in a dark place; Jeremiah and his lamentations, the apostle Paul never lost hope in the Lord but he was certainly in a bad emotional place. Men like Spurgeon, Hudson Taylor, C.S. Lewis all struggled with depression in their lives. It's not something that only people that aren't spiritually mature struggle with.

Turn to **1Kings Chapter 19** and we're going to look at the prophet Elijah. There's no way in a 45-minute message that we're going to be able to tackle every aspect of depression, but at least this portion of God's Word will give us an understanding of what we're struggling with and some remedies we can apply in our life. What are some of the reasons we might struggle with depression?

Reasons for Depression

1Kings 19:1-3 - *"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do [to me], and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. ³ And when he saw [that], he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which [belongeth] to Judah, and left his servant there."*

The first reason for struggling with depression is Elijah's response. He comes to these prophets of Baal ... he experiences this great victory in his life where God uses him mightily to defeat these prophets of Baal. In the very next chapter he is running from Jezebel. After a great victory comes a great attack. I've found this to be true in my life. Our enemy isn't going to stand idly by and allow us to go through a victory without opposing us in some way. The highest highs are often associated with the lowest lows. When God is working miracles through us, on the other side of that is going to be a low. Elijah's response to Jezebel's threat is a sinful response. We may have a sinful response to what God is doing or the circumstance or situation that we're facing. A lot of depression in our life can be driven by sin. When we're not living in accordance with God's Word, we've grieved the Holy Spirit of God, Who is the joy-giver. The opposite of joy sometimes can be called depression.

1Kings 19:4 - *"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."*

Failure

Elijah is overwhelmed and looking at his life as a failure. He's despairing his life. He feels like he's failed. Maybe commonly referred to as a mid-life crisis ... examining what we've accomplished in our lives and we're not where we'd thought we'd be at this point in our life ... trade in our spouse for a

younger model ... start wearing weird clothes ... all because we feel like we're a failure and we're trying to fill that void in our life. It can cause us to become depressed.

1Kings 19:5-8 - *"And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise [and] eat. ⁶ And he looked, and, behold, [there was] a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. ⁷ And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise [and] eat; because the journey [is] too great for thee. ⁸ And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."*

In this passage, we see that he's not really eating the way he should so God intercedes and feeds him. He goes for 40 days without any food from that point. 40 days! The journey that he's going to make is about a 200-mile walk in the wilderness with a little bit of food in his stomach. That's significant, isn't it?

1Kings 18:46 - *"And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."*

Fatigue

Fatigue can push us into a place of depression. It's so bad that God sends one of His angels down to make Elijah some food. He's in such a bad place that God has to intercede and say, 'Get up and eat.' There is a physical component that can push us to that place of depression. Sometimes it is grief that can cause us to spiral into that place. Lack of sleep is another thing that can push you to the place of depression. Stress also might push you to that place of depression.

1Kings 19:9-10 - *"And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD [came] to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? ¹⁰ And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, [even] I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."*

Futility

Elijah is looking at his life and thinking he has no purpose, he has no way. He's feeling sorry for himself. Oftentimes, depression can be brought on by self pity, when we become hyper-focused on ME, overly focused on ME. It's a formula for depression when we're only looking at ourselves. We get in that funk where we're viewing all of life through a small slice of life. It's a huge issue ... when we all start to slide there, we begin to look at our entire existence through that dark lens of depression and we don't see things realistically. Elijah is in a bad spot. These same things can cause us to move there.

Remedies for Depression

1) Take care of yourself physically

Elijah has overextended himself physically. We need rest and nourishment. You are just as much a steward of your physical body as you are your finances. You don't belong to you ... your body is a

temple of the Holy Ghost. You are bought with a price. You steward your body for Him. We need to make sure we're getting the proper amount of rest. If you're not resting the way God made you to rest, you will eventually blow a gasket. Pedal to the metal ... no. You have to steward your own life in terms of the rest you need to get. There is a reason God created the Sabbath ... so God can rejuvenate us. We also need to make sure we have the proper diet. Am I fueling my body the way God intends it to be fueled? A lot of physiological problems can be traced to what we eat. How about an occasional moment of exercise? We used to live in a world of manual labor but now we sit behind a desk all day. Your body needs to work but you don't have to go overboard. **1 Timothy 4:8** is no excuse for not exercising ... read it in context.

2) Deal with unconfessed sin

When generally feeling down, my first place that I look is in my heart. I want to make sure that I don't have unconfessed sin in my life that's driving me to that place.

Psalms 32:3-5 - *"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. ⁴ For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah."*

David feels God's hand heavy upon him. His depressed state turns once he acknowledges he has sin in his life. Most times we have grieved the joy-giver. Could it be that we've got something in our heart that is interfering with the joy-giver and God's hand is heavy upon us? He wants to restore that joy of salvation that's found with Christ. Read **Psalms 51** as he goes through the confession and is begging God to restore the joy of his salvation. It's important for us as believers to stay clean and make sure that we don't have sin that's stealing our joy.

3) Let God and the body minister to you during times of depression

1 Kings 19:5-8 - *"And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise [and] eat. ⁶ And he looked, and, behold, [there was] a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. ⁷ And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise [and] eat; because the journey [is] too great for thee. ⁸ And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."*

God ministers to Elijah in this time. Sometimes we resist that. Elijah could've said. 'Leave me alone, I want to sleep.' But He will minister to you if you allow Him to. Elijah calls Elisha to be his protégé.

1 Kings 19:19-21 - *"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who [was] plowing [with] twelve yoke [of oxen] before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and [then] I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? ²¹ And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."*

Elisha ministered to Elijah. We need to allow God and the body to minister to us when we find ourselves in this place. Too often we resist, we don't let God come in and do a work and minister to

us. More often, we're resistant to allowing the body to care for us. When we're depressed, we want to be left alone. Do you know where you need to be? With God's people. Depression is isolating; it withdraws. It's a shame that we feel we've got to pretend like we're ok when we come to church. We should be able to come when we're *not* ok.

It's ok to not be ok, but it's not ok to stay there.

Elijah wanted to be left alone but God steps in. We are to bear one another's burdens. When I'm not ok, I need you to bear my burden. You can let others help bear your burdens, too. Let your pride go, it's not a sign of weakness. When you're hurting, you need people to come alongside of you and hold you up. You are going to do that for somebody else at some point in time. That's why church is so important in your life. Your flesh wants to disconnect but fight that urge and let God and the body minister to you.

4) Listen to the still small voice of God

1Kings 19:11-12 - *"And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; [but] the LORD [was] not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; [but] the LORD [was] not in the earthquake: ¹² And after the earthquake a fire; [but] the LORD [was] not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."*

Elijah is in such a funk, he can't perceive God in these huge, miraculous things going on around him. Sometimes we can get to the place where we don't perceive God working in our life at all because we're so blinded by our depressed state. Finally, He clears the chaos and the distraction and all the noise in his head long enough to hear God speak to him. We need that in our life. Why is it so important? Because our perception of reality isn't always right. It is often wrong, especially when we're in that depressed place. Elijah's perception is he's all alone, the only one doing the right thing. That wasn't true. In **Verse 18**, God says to him that I have left me 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that haven't bowed to Baal ... When we get to "that place" our perception isn't real. We need God's Word to speak truth in our life to tell us what is reality. Our flesh tries to get us to do things that are contrary to what God would have us do, especially in those times that we're struggling.

Our perception of reality isn't always right

5) Accept the gentle rebuke of the Lord

1Kings 19:13-14 - *"And it was [so], when Elijah heard [it], that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, [there came] a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? ¹⁴ And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, [even] I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."*

God asks Elijah the same question: What are you doing here? God doesn't ask questions for His benefit, it's for the benefit of the person that's being asked. When we're depressed and feeling sorry for ourselves, God, in His still small voice says, 'What are you doing here? Why are you in this

place?' He doesn't want us to live in that place, He wants to give us victory. But we have to be receptive to that gentle rebuke from the Lord.

6) Start once again living for God and others

1Kings 19:15-17 - *"And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael [to be] king over Syria: ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint [to be] king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint [to be] prophet in thy room. ¹⁷ And it shall come to pass, [that] him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay."*

Elijah's response is based in self-pity. God says go and return. Here's the idea: God has a plan, God is working even when we can't understand it. Elijah is allowing himself to get derailed and God reminds him He has a work for Elijah to do. It's easy to become obsessed with what we're going through but God has a plan for you. One of the primary tactics of our enemy is to distract you from doing that and he'll use any means necessary to cause you to get sidetracked. The enemy knows which buttons to push. Isn't it interesting? We tend to focus on that one person that is mad at us or disagree with us. God can be doing miraculous things in our life but that one person says something about us and we take our eyes off the Lord and onto self.

God has a plan for you and is working even when you can't understand it.

He tells Elijah to go out the same way he came in. The road to recovery from depression isn't always a short road. The farther we walk into the wilderness, the farther we walk to get out. But God will ultimately give us the victory. Remember who you are ... if you're a believer, you're a child of God. He has a purpose for you ... your life matters. Don't allow the enemy to derail you from that. We're all going to have moments when we feel down, but we can't allow one day or one week to turn into weeks or months. Wherever you are, God can give you victory and overcome.

1Corinthians 15:57-58 - *"But thanks [be] to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."*

We have the victory already! Be stedfast, unmoveable ... we have the victory through Jesus Christ!

Believers have the victory through Jesus Christ!

† *Father, we ask You to help us live in the power of the truth that we have victory through Jesus Christ. I pray You would help us to know that You love us and are concerned, and You want to give us the victory.*

The circumstances we're facing now is causing it to become difficult, but even in our circumstances, I pray we would understand that through Jesus we have the victory. We desire to have the joy of our salvation to be restored in us. Father, bring that joy once again! Help us to remember that we don't have to pretend when we're hurting. I pray we can learn from Elijah's example and grow in our faith and gain victory in our lives.

We pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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OVERCOMING DOUBT

Anybody here ever been in a storm, in a tornado? Scary! I've been in a couple of hurricanes out in New Jersey. It can be scary ... your lights going off, your roof coming off. The only scarier thing would be to be in that type of weather and be out in a boat. To be in your basement, that's bad. But to be in a sizeable body of water, there's nowhere to go. I've been on a cruise ship when a hurricane was close by ... that wasn't fun! Everyone was seasick. But imagine being in a small fishing boat! We're going to look at a story today that's going to involve those types of conditions. You're familiar with this story in **Matthew Chapter 14** ...

Matthew 14:22-33 - *"And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. ²⁴ But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. ²⁷ But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. ²⁸ And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. ²⁹ And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. ³¹ And immediately Jesus stretched forth [his] hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? ³² And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. ³³ Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God."*

Matthew 14:22-24 - *"And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. ²⁴ But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary."*

The disciples are in a small boat making their way across a body of water, in the middle of the sea, so it's probably not swimmable. They're being tossed back and forth with the waves and the wind is blowing against them. Can you imagine how unstable that felt? There's an uncertain outcome here. Many of them had been around and on the water for years and years, but this is a big storm. How uncomfortable that must have been. Another important factor: *Jesus is not with them*. He's not present. They are fearful and doubting the outcome of what's going to happen. A great metaphor for life is weather. Today is sunny, we enjoy it. Overcast days aren't quite as fun. Days of rain ... but then sometimes in life we get in a storm and feel like we're getting blown all over the place. It is

unstable, uncertain, uncomfortable. And where is Jesus is your storm? It feels like He's not there. Our response to that is we become fearful and begin to doubt.

What the disciples are experiencing here is oftentimes what we experience when we're in a storm. This story can help us navigate our storm. When we have little faith, we can see some of the causes and help us to overcome our storm.

Life is Filled with Storms

Matthew 14:25-26 - *“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.”*

They're in a storm being tossed back and forth. The Jewish evening was divided into four 3-hour watches from 6pm to 6am. The fourth watch is 3am-6am. They see something that they think is a ghost coming at them on the water. They're scared, they don't know who or what is coming at them.

It's not until late in the game that Jesus shows up to help them. Oftentimes in life, it seems like God shows up in the 4th quarter. I think this story gives us a beautiful picture of what we're experiencing right now in our time. The New Testament calls the church age "The Night". Remember what watch they're in when Jesus shows up. All they see is the storm and He comes walking out in the storm. God's timing is always perfect, even when we don't understand what's going on. He's right on time, He shows up exactly at the moment He's supposed to. It's encouraging to me that Jesus always meets us in our place of need, and usually in a miraculous way.

Jesus didn't have a boat but He's the One Who controls the wind and the waves. We serve a God that can do miracles. The men on the boat never thought Jesus would show up walking on the water. They had seen Jesus do some pretty crazy things, like feed the 5,000 with some fish and a couple loaves of bread. Never forget you serve a God that can do miracles!

Matthew 14:27-31 - *“But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. 29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”*

They didn't recognize Jesus, but they recognized His voice.

John 10:4 - *“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.”*

They recognized that this was their Saviour. Peter asks to come to Him on the water. I don't think he's making a selfish request ... the wording is important. His request is driven by a desire to be near Jesus. Peter is a Jesus-follower. As a follower of Jesus, his entire life revolved around walking where Jesus walked. His whole life was about doing what Jesus did, so his request was one of wanting to be near his Saviour and to follow Him. If Jesus would've said, 'No, stay where you are,' Peter wouldn't have gotten out of the boat. It was Jesus' will that Peter would come. Peter actually

walks on water! Peter! He steps out of the boat and actually walks on water! We sometimes give Peter a hard time because he sinks ... but nobody else got out of the boat!

If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat.

He had enough faith to at least trust Jesus in that decision. It was based upon the command of his Saviour. You can do whatever God calls you to do. We often think about us being in the boat and God is calling us to take that step of faith, but our fear and doubt hold us back. We have to understand that if God has said something to us, asked us to do something, we can do it if we'll just act obediently to what He says.

Even after Peter takes the step and walks on water, doubt begins to creep into his heart and he starts to sink. The main factor of what caused him to sink is his focus turns from Jesus.

He is initially focused on the Saviour

Hebrews 12:1-3 - *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."*

Each of us have a race to run, it's a course that only you can run. But we have to run that race setting aside the weights and we have to focus on Jesus. If we lose sight of Him, we become weary and faint in our mind. Then we quit, we sink. Stay focused on Jesus. When we are struggling and being tossed to-and-fro, we have to keep our eyes firmly planted on Jesus.

When our eyes drift away from Jesus, we sink.

He becomes distracted by his Surroundings

Matthew 14:30a - *"But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink..."*

Don't become distracted by your surroundings. Don't stop looking at the Saviour and become distracted by your surroundings. He started looking at how big the waves were and how strong the wind was. When we do that, our hearts fill with fear and doubt sets in. Don't lose sight of the One Who is keeping you up! When we're in a storm, do you know what we see? The storm. Don't lose sight of Jesus.

Isaiah 51:12-13 - *"I, [even] I, [am] he that comforteth you: who [art] thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man [that] shall die, and of the son of man [which] shall be made [as] grass; ¹³ And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where [is] the fury of the oppressor?"*

In this passage of Isaiah, God is speaking to Israel. Do you know what Isaiah is saying to Israel? You've forgotten God. Look at the result -- they feared continually. Most people go through life daily in fear. Sometimes more than others but we're continually faced with fear. Marketing plays with your emotions on fear. We've forgotten the Lord that stretched out the heavens and made the foundations. He's got it! He understands! He's powerful enough to deal with what you're facing in life.

God is powerful enough to deal with what you're facing in life.

He becomes preoccupied with Self

Jesus asks Peter, "wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Who is Peter doubting? Jesus? Jesus wasn't sinking. Could it be that Peter is doubting his own ability to do what God had called him to do? Jesus said, 'Come on out.' Peter begins to doubt his own ability but God never asks us to do something He doesn't equip us to do. We need God's power, His sufficiency in order to fulfill His call. **When we become preoccupied with self, we begin to doubt.**

Matthew 8:27 - *"But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!"*

Peter doubted Jesus before and just a few chapters later, He doubts Him again. He saw Jesus talk to the wind, talk to the sea -- "Be calm" -- he saw that! Here he is again, out on the water, and he's doubting. It's our preoccupation with ourselves that oftentimes stops us from doing what God has called us to do.

Romans 4:19 - *"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb."*

God told Abraham He was going to have a child with Sara and he put his faith and trust in God's promise. When God calls us to do something, don't consider your ability but trust Him to equip you.

Matthew 14:30-33 - *"But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? 32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. 33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God."*

Peter offers maybe the shortest prayer in scripture -- "Lord, save me!" It's short but it is effective! He didn't get down on his knees and say many words ... no time for flowery language, just **Save me!** When sinking into doubt we need to pray. Three words, but it works.

When my faith is weak, my prayers should be strong.

Luke 17:5 - *“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”* Jesus had just taught them about forgiveness and they are asking for Him to increase their faith. Ask God to increase your faith and expand your ability to trust Him more. God, increase my capacity for faith in You.

Mark 9:24 - *“And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”*

He's expressing the duality within all of our hearts. I believe You, Father, but I'm struggling to trust You in this.

When sinking into doubt we need to surrender.

“Lord, save me” - Peter grew up on that water. Probably every day he was in or around the water. He'd been in storms before on the water. He could swim. His name means "rock" or "stone".

John 21:7 - *“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.”*

Peter could swim. Why does He cry out to the Lord to save Him? I think because He recognizes it is something a little different. Every time I've stepped off a boat or jumped into water, I haven't **begun** to sink ... **I sink!** But it says "beginning to sink". When we're in those moments of doubt and feel ourselves starting to sink, it's in those moments we need to cry out to God and ask Him to save you ... not just being saved from your sin, that's part of it, but just your situation. It's a moment of total surrender, where you open your hand and let go and say, *'God, this is beyond me. Save me from this.'* It's not a comfortable place to be, but that's exactly where God wants us to be. We are not in control. We all like to control, manage, manipulate. Yet God wants us to get to a place where we let go and let God. Leave it in His hands. He'll do a better job!

Moments of little faith (doubt) are opportunities for big growth.

Matthew 14:33 - *“Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”*

Final thought: Moments of little faith or doubt are opportunities for big growth. When we find ourselves in a situation and we start to sink into that doubtful place, when we take that step of uncertainty off the brink and into the water and we have to surrender, it takes us to a deeper place and deeper understanding of Who Jesus is. That's all that God wants for us, to go to that deeper place of worship, loving Him more and more and growing deeper in faith.

Paul says, 'that I may know Him.' That's all God wants for us.

As long as we're in the boat, we're never going to experience that. When we step out, even though we struggle and begin to sink ... we surrender and He saves us ... we move to that deeper place with God. They were doubting but they grew in faith.

Who put them in the boat and sent them out into the water? Jesus did. He knew exactly what they were going to come up against but He wanted them to worship Him for Who He was ... The Son of God. When we're up against a life storm we think, 'Where in the world is God? Does He even care?'

We have to pause and remember how much He loves us and wants the very best for us. Our perspective is often limited and what we think is best isn't always what's best. He desires for us to trust Him in the midst of the storm.

I love this story because Jesus doesn't kick Peter to the curb. He uses the situation as an opportunity for Peter to grow. Peter isn't perfect from this point on (he denies Christ!) but Jesus used the episode to grow Peter's faith and the faith of the others in the boat and help them get past that moment of doubt.

Go to God in prayer. Ask Him for faith to deal with your storms. Keep your eyes on Jesus ... it's an opportunity for growth.

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† *Father, we ask You to help us increase our faith and look to You in our storms. We want to grow closer to You and become more like You. We give our situations over to You and ask You to work mightily in them.*

We pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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Watch: <https://youtu.be/q6FZDPYlwHA>



Overcoming Addiction

1 Corinthians 16:15 - *"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)"*

Addiction is bondage to the rule of a substance, activity or state of mind which then becomes the center of our life. When you talk about addiction today, at least in a secular world, it is most often described as a disease ... that addiction is a disease that the person has no power over or responsibility for. It is to take the responsibility off of a person and put the fault somewhere else. If we say someone is born with it, we are actually blaming God, aren't we? That phrase "disease" is chosen to relieve the addict of responsibility. Even if there are physiological tendencies "hard-wired" into us, it doesn't mean that self-control is not possible.

I don't believe Scripture teaches that addiction is a disease. Addiction is ultimately the result of sinful activity. That may seem harsh, but it is actually truthful, compassionate and hopeful. If I am responsible and sin is the issue, then there is a solution, there is a cure. God has promised us in His Word that He will bring victory in our lives over sin and He can cause us to live a victorious life. The disease model teaches skills to cope with what you have. God, Scripture, shows us that we have an issue with sin and there is a solution.

Addiction is ultimately the result of sinful activity.

All we have to do is read God's Word. I would encourage you to read the first part of **Romans Chapter 6**. There is no question that addiction manifests itself in our physical bodies. First and foremost, addiction is a matter of the heart. It is not physiological, but spiritual. Over time, as I repeatedly engage in sinful activities, I become servant to that sin.

Addiction is a spiritual matter of the heart.

John 8:31-34 - *"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. 33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."*

Jesus is talking to his disciples and the religious leaders in Israel. He's very clear when He says we become the servant of sin.

Proverbs 5:22 - *“His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, And he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.”*

We become a servant, we become a slave, we become a person who is in bondage to our sinfulness; it has us bound up.

All addictions begin with one ... one drink, one toke, one hit, one action. That can lead to disaster, depending upon what the "one" is. But if we repeatedly commit the same sin, it doesn't take long for us to feel as though we are in bondage. Many addicted describe the feeling as in bondage, or out-of-control, as a victim with no choice in the matter. This is where the "disease mentality" comes into play. But what we have to understand is that it's the repetition in our life that brings the enslavement.

It's the repetition in our life that brings the enslavement.

1Kings 21:25 - *“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.”*

Ahab sold himself to do what? wickedness. He's in bondage to his wicked, sinful activity. It's running the show, it's his taskmaster. None of us are beyond that. As a result of those repeated acts of wickedness and sinfulness in our own life, we can find ourselves physiologically dependent upon that ... our body actually becomes physically dependent upon that sin.

A very common example of this is what happens in your brain when you engage in social media. There's not a person in here that isn't addicted to the little thing that's in your hand or pocket or purse right now ... your phone. When you go back and look at your social media "likes" it releases endorphins in your brain. It feeds my desire for acceptance ... and we need people to "Like" us so we feel better about ourselves. Social media is just like gossip that's out there. They're not even trying to hide it! You see, it isn't just alcohol, meth or heroine... the issue isn't social media ... it's a matter of the heart. Where are you finding acceptance? We all have an addiction issue. But I want to cause us to think about it a little differently this morning ... to think Scripturally.

We all have an addiction issue.

The chief sin that God talks about repeatedly is the sin of idolatry. The 10 Commandments start with, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me" ... right out of the gate, God addresses the sin of idolatry. I am God and get rid of all your other gods and don't make any graven images of gods. This isn't an issue of statues in your house. All of us are prone to wander and engage in idolatress activity and are prone to worship things other than God.

The chief sin God talks about in His Word is idolatry.

Look what Jesus says in Mark Chapter 12 --

Mark 12:30 - *“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”*

When I am addicted, I love something more than God. It's when I desire something in the creation more than I desire the Creator.

Jesus gets right to the main point - you need to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. There is a spiritual component, emotional component and physical component. When I am addicted, I love something more than God. I am giving my life over to worship a little-g god other than Big-G, God. It's when I desire something in the creation more than I desire the Creator. The world steals our affection. It pulls our heart away from worshipping God and on to something that's inferior to him. Idolatry is our default mode. It's where I go naturally. Left to myself, my heart wanders from God ... so does yours. People are not basically good. We're all in the same boat, but our default mode is to move away from the Lord, not toward Him. At its core, addiction is a worship issue ... what am I worshipping? Worship is not just singing. We sing praise to God as a form of worship to God. But what am I directing my affection at? What am I giving my life to?

Addiction is a worship issue.

You are always worshipping. God created you that way. Your affection is always being poured toward something. All gods in Scripture are things that are used for a person's benefit. Something to find meaning, power and pleasure that is apart from God. At the end of the day, what are we talking about? Worshipping self. They end up deceiving us and making us a slave. That's the tragedy.

Look with me back in 2Peter Chapter 2. These gods are similar to false teachers ...

2Peter 2:18-19 - *"For when they speak great swelling [words] of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, [through much] wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. ¹⁹ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."*

So they make great promises, great words of vanity ... and when we get there, we find what they're actually selling is bondage. Before you know it, we're enslaved and don't feel like we can get free because we've given ourselves over to that false god that made all of these promises to us.

Look in **Deuteronomy Chapter 11** -- God says to the nation of Israel, some advice about idolatry --

Deuteronomy 11:16 - *"Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;"*

Notice He brings that short little verse with the phrase "take heed to yourselves" ... it's in those small steps of spiritual casualness that we start down a path that can become difficult to return from. Those moments where we say, 'What's the big deal? God will forgive me. It's just one.' Before you know it, we can become desensitized to the difference between what's right and wrong. Notice it says 'that your heart be not deceived.' They cause us to turn from following God. Before you know it, you're turning and looking away from God. We end up a servant to these false gods. They are now calling the shots in our life and we feel trapped, like we're not in control. We pour our entire life into chasing that god. It started with a momentary lapse and it ends up in bondage.

It starts with a momentary lapse and ends up in bondage.

The question before us is who or what is your master? **Who** or **what** are you serving with your life? If the answer to those questions is anything other than "The Lord", you've got an addition issue.

1John 5:21 - *"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."*

So how do we get victory? Are you going to be a victim or victor?

There is victory through Jesus Christ!

Victory Through Personal Responsibility

You've got to own it! You have to realize that you are the problem and are responsible for where you are. It's not Mom and Dad's fault, genetics' fault, a friend's fault. From the very beginning with Adam and Eve, we blame others.

Psalms 32:5 - *"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, And mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah."*

Realize you are the one at fault and then hate the sin. Own the responsibility for it.

Victory Through Confession

As with any sin, we need forgiveness. In Scripture, confession is always accompanied with repentance. Repentance is turning ... turning away from your sin and back toward God. **You are not going to get victory if you don't turn.** Don't ask God to forgive you if you're not willing to turn and change. We can get to the point that we're so reliant that our body is actually physically addicted to that stimulant, but we have to get clean and let God work through your life.

1John 1:9 - *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Victory Through Commitment

You have to diligently commit to following God's ways, every day, all of the time. That should be our goal. Give yourself over to following Him in every circumstance, every temptation.

Romans 6:16, 19 - *"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?... 19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."*

He says "yield" - who are you yielding to? He says "surrender" - who are you surrendering to? Who are you serving? Who are you obeying? Is it your own fleshly desire? or God Almighty? Who are you serving? yourself or the Lord? Are you serving the lust of your flesh? or the Lord?

God is saying, through Paul, that just as you did what you wanted ... the commitment you had to sin, all that you gave to that, all that energy you poured into chasing sin -- now direct that mentality toward God. Yield, serve, obey, love, sacrifice, give prominence and priority to. If we chased God

like we chase money, we'd be doing alright! Yield your life to Him. Make yourself servant to Him. Pour your life into Him! Overcoming addiction is not easy. It requires extreme commitment to following the Lord and dedication and diligence ... If we try to stop doing something, there's a void. We need to fill that void. Fill it with serving God.

Romans 7:18-25 - *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but [how] to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹ For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ²⁰ Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? ²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."*

1Corinthians 16:15 - *"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)"*

Be addicted to GOD!

Do you want to be an addict? Be addicted to God, be addicted to ministry. Go after it like a drug addict goes after his drug of choice ... with the same commitment and intensity. That's why this is a worship issue. You were created to be addicted ... to Him. The problem is we get addicted to the wrong things and we find ourselves as a servant to "it" instead of a servant to God.

Victory Through Accountability

Get help with it! You are not alone. Obviously God will help you. The church exists, or it should exist, to help you. We're all in this together. We're all just sinners trying to walk with Jesus. From time-to-time, we need some support through that.

Galatians 6:1-2 - *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. 2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."*

We are, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to bear one another's burdens, to be there for each other and keep one another accountable. We need someone in our life that will support us, help us, guide us, be strong for us and hold us accountable to do the right thing.

In our church, we have a ministry every Friday night -- [Reformers Unanimous](#). For people to come and be ministered to and be supported and held accountable. That ministry is for anyone, not just those here at Grace. We all struggle, we take that heart and direct it toward something else than following the Lord. We find ourselves idol worshipping, addicted. Some addictions are more socially accepted than others.

If you find yourself in bondage to addiction, we are here to help. Mike and Liz Shore, who head up the [RU Ministry](#), are here and will be happy to talk with you today or any time. You don't have to live in bondage any more. You can be forgiven today. Search your heart and ask yourself if there is

anything, anyone ... other than the Lord ... that's at the center of your heart? Are you yielded to God? Are you His servant and obeying the things that He asks of you in His Word? Let God help give you the victory over those idols that steal your affection and lure you away to bondage.

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† *Father, thank You for this time together this morning. We lift up our hearts together and we understand that we are prone to wander. We pray that we will continually make You the center of our affection and that we decide to follow You with everything we have.*

We love You, thank You and praise You. We pray all of this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV8sBlS-Xk8>



Overcoming Guilt

There's not a person here who hasn't experienced feeling guilty. When we cross a line we know we shouldn't cross ... when we do, say or think something that we know we shouldn't do ... or the opposite of that. But there are many people who are in bondage to guilt; they are burdened by guilt, weighed down by guilt, shackled with these feelings of guilt. It just wears you out! Today we're going to talk about how we're going to get victory over that ... how God can help us to overcome that.

Not all guilt is bad. **2Cor. 7:10** is a launching point for what we're going to talk about today.

2Corinthians 7:10 - *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*

There are two different types of sorrow in this verse. First there is a Godly sorrow or guilt, conviction, within us. I believe God hard-wires into all of humanity the conscience that knows the difference between right and wrong or good and bad, and alerts us when something isn't right; a signal that we've crossed the line. It's not dissimilar from a smoke alarm in your house—it alerts you that something is wrong. When alarms go off for a legitimate reason, it's a warning to say "there's a problem, an issue you need to deal with". That's what conviction can be in our heart, a Godly sorrow or guilt that says, "Stop, don't do that!" or "Do this". This passage says that it "worketh repentance". A Godly guilt comes upon me and leads me to turn back toward God. A danger that we can get into is we ignore that over and over and you can actually sear your conscience so that warning isn't effective anymore.

1Timothy 4:2 - *"Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;"*

If you took a hot iron and pressed it against your skin, you seared your skin. Eventually that skin will grow back but you won't have feeling there anymore because you've killed the nerves in that area. That's what happens when we ignore God's conviction in our lives.

Psalms 32:1-5 - *"... Blessed [is he whose] transgression [is] forgiven, [whose] sin [is] covered. ² Blessed [is] the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit [there is] no guile. ³ When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. ⁴ For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah."*

The fact that God is willing to forgive us is a blessing. David wasn't confessing his sin and God's hand was heavy upon him with the weight of conviction. When he acknowledged his sin, God forgave him. When we're in that place of guilt and carrying it around, there's a weight on us. But we can experience forgiveness when we turn back to God and confess. God is faithful and just to

forgive us our sins. That conscience is present in both lost and saved people. It's hard-wired into us. This is, to a large extent, why people want to get rid of God. In New York City there was an atheist group whose motto was "No guilt, no God."

God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

The other sorrow mentioned in **2Cor. 7:10** is **death**. There's a guilt that we can carry around with us that's destructive. Our enemy uses that to derail us from fulfilling God's purpose in our life. If he (the enemy) can cause us to feel guilty about something we've done in our past that's been forgiven, then it will keep us from fulfilling God's purpose for us.

Revelation 12:10 - *"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."*

One of the enemy's titles is "accuser of the brethren". He tries to bring up our past ... *"remember when you did this?"* He wants us feel unworthy of being used by God. We typically experience these types of feelings in our life. Feelings can lead us the wrong direction but our feelings are frequently wrong.

We have to trust the truth of God's Word.

FOUR TRUTHS about a believer's standing with God which bring victory over guilt:

1--You Are a New Person in Christ.

2Corinthians 5:17 - *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

If you've trusted Christ as Saviour, you are in Christ. If you've been saved, you are a new creature. At salvation, God did a brand new thing in you! This isn't a refurb/remodel/restoration/rebuild...this is a tear down and build new project. The old things are passed away, all things are become new.

Philippians 3:13-14 - *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

2--You Have a New Purpose

Paul's horrible, wicked past. Look with me in **Acts Chapter 7** --

Acts 7:57-8:3 - *"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, ⁵⁸ And cast [him] out of the city, and stoned [him]: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen, calling upon [God], and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. ⁶⁰ And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that*

time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen [to his burial], and made great lamentation over him. ³ As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed [them] to prison.”

Think about the struggle Paul must have had. One thing – forget. The enemy brings up our past to distract us from fulfilling God’s purpose. Chasing the prize. Running a race.

1 Corinthians 9:25 - *“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.”*

“press” = “persecute” in [Acts 26:11](#)

Ephesians 3:20 - *“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,”*

3--You Have a New Potential

People may have told you you’ll never amount to much, that your life is ruined, that you aren’t as good, smart or pretty as so-and-so. God wants to display his power through your life. He is able to do anything above all that we ask or think! The new potential isn’t about **you** or your potential ... **it’s about God and His potential!** Jesus can transform you and redeem your guilty past. Your future does not depend on what you think you can achieve or even on what others think about you. It is built upon the power of Christ to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. Peter denied Christ but became a pillar in the early church. God made man out of the dust of the ground. He can make a brand new creation out of the dust of your past. This isn’t a matter of trying harder; it’s about fully receiving the power of God available to you and allowing Him to heal you by working in you and through you.

4--You Have a New Presentation

Paul often had opportunity to share his story with others. In **Acts Chapter 26**, he is sharing his story with King Agrippa. Part of his story involves his wicked past. The thing he was most ashamed of and felt guilty about ...

Acts 26:9-11 - *“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against [them]. ¹¹ And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled [them] to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted [them] even unto strange cities.”*

Paul doesn’t glory in his past but he also doesn’t shy away from it. But his story doesn’t end there...

Acts 26:15-18 - *“And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. ¹⁶ But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; ¹⁷ Delivering thee from the people, and [from] the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, ¹⁸ To open their eyes, [and] to turn [them] from darkness to light, and [from] the power of*

Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”

The unconditional love of God means that the past is completely forgiven and forgotten by God. You can start all over again! Is your testimony ruined forever because you made a bad choice? No way! Don't be afraid to start over and present yourself as one who has fallen but risen again to stand tall! Like the Etch-a-Sketch toy ... I was never really able to create anything much more complex than stairs with that toy! I tried to draw a horse, mountains, etc., but mostly ended up with a lot of squiggly lines. You know the best part of the toy, don't you? When you mess up, all you have to do is shake it and you get a fresh start! We hand God our Etch-a-Sketch life all messed up and He takes it and shakes it and gives us a fresh start!

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† *Father, Thank You for Your Word. Help us to trust the truth of Your Word. Thank you for being a faithful and just God Who forgives our sin. Help us to overcome the bondage of guilt and trust You with all of our heart.*

We love You, thank You and praise You. We pray all of this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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OVERCOMING GRIEF

1Thessalonians 4:13-18 – *“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷ Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*

I remember my first real encounter with grief. I was nine years old and my grandfather had passed away. I remember the days leading up to the funeral, my mom crying, my dad doing the best he could to console and comfort her at that time. I remember the weeping intensifying as the day of the funeral got closer. I saw the flowers and smelled the fragrance coming off of them. Then I remember seeing the casket with my grandpa in it. I remember hurting, myself, but also hurting for my mom. There wasn't anything I could do or say to comfort her in that moment or to make it go away.

As I'm describing that, I'm sure you have a story similar to that. Certainly everybody has experienced the loss of a loved one. We've all been through the experience of grief. The closer the person is to you, the more intense the grief. People grieve in different ways. We each have a unique way of dealing with grief. Crying, loss of appetite, a gain in appetite, loss of purpose or loss of interest in things of life, and even a turning-away from God in those moments.

We all grieve differently, but believers have HOPE in Christ!

The sad reality is, we live in a fallen world and as a result of that we are surrounded by loss in death. However, for the believer, that loss doesn't have to be associated with a sorrow that's filled with hopelessness. Because in Christ, we have hope.

We're going to talk today about overcoming grief. Part of our family here at Grace has suffered loss lately, so hopefully this message will bring comfort. But we've all experienced loss and Paul says in **1Thessalonians Chapter 4** --

1Thessalonians 4:13 - *“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”*

Paul, first of all, expresses a sorrow in death, and the believers at Thessalonica are suffering loss. He's saying to them, 'Don't ignore this truth. What I'm about to say is going to help you deal with the loss that you're struggling with.' Asleep -- He's not talking about people that are taking a nap, he's talking about people who have passed away. He's not saying don't sorrow, He's saying don't sorrow like those who don't have hope. There are multiple examples in Scripture of Godly people who mourn. Job experienced great grief. He lost all of his children, much of his possessions, his own health ... grief is a natural result of what he went through.

Sorrow in Death

Examples of saints sorrowing:

- Job experienced great grief - **Job 2:13** - *"So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great."*
- Abraham mourns for Sarah – Associated with that mourning is crying. **Genesis 23:2** - *"And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her."*
- Jacob mourns for Joseph when we received news he was killed by a wild animal. **Genesis 37:34-35** - *"And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him."*

Solomon writes this in **Ecclesiastes 3:1-4** – *"To every [thing there is] a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ² A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up [that which is] planted; ³ A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;"*

Solomon says there is an appropriate time for weeping, for mourning ... but that grief we experience when a loved one passes away should not be a hopeless sorrow. It shouldn't take us to a place where it is debilitating. But grief is a process. C.S. Lewis once said, "We do not get over grief, we get through grief." When we lose someone that's close to us, there's a piece of us that's gone, but over time God heals that wound and we learn to live with it but we're never quite the same.

Studies have shown the average length of intense grief is about 2-4 months. The Jewish people set aside everything for about 30 days to mourn. We've got to walk through the valley of the shadow of death but we don't camp out there. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have hope in Him. There's a hope in death.

We've got to walk through the valley of the shadow of death but we don't camp out there.

Deuteronomy 34:8 - *“And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.”*

1Thessalonians 4:14 - *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”*

Hope in Death

As believers in Jesus Christ, we don't have to sorrow because we have hope in Christ. Jesus is our ONLY hope. Paul begins his letter in **1Timothy 1:1** - *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;”* HE is our hope!

Titus 1:2 - *“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;”*

God can't lie! He's promised if you put your trust in Christ, our Hope and Saviour, we have the hope of an eternal life from a God that cannot lie. We may sorrow, we may grieve, but we're not sorrowing to the point of despair in a hopeless way because our hope is in Jesus Christ. It's the resurrection that gives us hope, the fact that Jesus came back from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father gives us hope that we'll be resurrected someday. We sorrow, but not as those who have no hope.

Turn to John Chapter 11. This is a story about a friend of Jesus, his name was Lazarus. Lazarus was sick and ends up dying. He had two sisters, Mary and Martha. Jesus arrives, in their view, late. Lazarus is now dead and buried. Mary and Martha are in that mourning process. Jesus stops outside of where they live and Mary and Martha make their way out to have a conversation with Jesus --

John 11:21-26 - *“Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. ²² But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give [it] thee. ²³ Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. ²⁴ Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. ²⁵ Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: ²⁶ And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”*

Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would still be alive.' She was blaming it on Jesus. When someone we love passes away, we tend to have all kinds of questions for God. In this scenario, Jesus has a question for Martha. 'Do you believe this?' He says, 'I am the resurrection. I am the life. You believe in Me, you won't die.' Do you believe that? That's the most important question for all of mankind. **Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life and that our hope is found only in Him?** If we believe that Jesus came, lived a perfect life, was crucified, died, buried and came back to life – got victory over death – If you believe that and received Him as Saviour, you will never die. You'll live eternally and we can have hope in that.

The resurrection is foundational to Christian faith.

Notice the practicality of good doctrine. The resurrection is foundational to Christian faith. If we have a proper biblical understanding of Jesus rising from the dead, that brings comfort and hope to you and me in times of great loss.

1Thessalonians 4:15-18 - *“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*

Not only is there a hope in death, there’s a comfort for us in death. It’s really easy for us to get to a place where we’re unwilling to receive the comfort that’s being offered to us.

Comfort in Death

Genesis 37:34-35 - *“And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.”*

This was a typical Jewish response to a loved-one passing away. You tear your garment, symbolizing the separation. All of a sudden, his family tries to comfort him but he refused to be comforted. Jacob is so grief-stricken that he’s refusing to be comforted. That’s not healthy. That’s not the intention that God has for us. When it becomes debilitating to us, when we continue to stay in that place of despair for an extended period, it’s not healthy. God can comfort us ... **Verse 18** – “with these words”. People’s words are sometimes annoying, but God’s Word isn’t and it brings comfort. **Verse 17** – we will be reunited with them again “in the clouds”. At the rapture, we’ll be gathered together in the clouds to meet Him. There will be a reunion that takes place with believers, caught up together in the air to meet Him. What a glorious time that’s going to be! We will see our loved ones again! There is great comfort in that thought. It says we will ever be with the Lord. It’s a great blessing to know we’ll be reunited with those loved ones that have gone on before us, but we are going to be with the Lord forever! Don’t lose sight of the Lord! Understand how awesome that’s going to be! It’s getting worse out in the world, but this is not our home. If you’re a believer, you’re a citizen of heaven. We are ambassadors here in a foreign land, but a citizen of heaven ... and one day, we will go home! We can’t imagine what it’s going to be like to be with Jesus.

If you’re a believer, you’re a citizen of heaven.

Matthew 5:4 - *“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”*

Psalms 16:11 - *“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”*

There's not a person in here that wouldn't sign up for that! Think about the most joyful thing that ever happened in your life ... you're going to experience that ALL OF THE TIME in heaven! Not only that, but pleasure forevermore. Mankind pursues pleasure. In heaven, there is pleasure forevermore.

Isaiah 60:19-20 – *“The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.²⁰ Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”*

Joyfulness, pleasure ...

Philippians 1:23-24 - *“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:²⁴ Nevertheless to abide in the flesh [is] more needful for you.”*

This world, for a lost person, is as close as they'll ever get to heaven.

But for a saved person, this is as close as you're ever going to get to hell.

We might say, 'I'm in between a rock and a hard place.' He doesn't know what to do. He wanted to go to heaven, which he describes as 'far better'. Do you realize that this world, for a lost person, is as close as they'll ever get to heaven. But for a saved person, this is as close as you're ever going to get to hell. We invest so much time into this life trying to make it better, pleasant, joyful, comfortable ... but the reality is, we'll not be able to do any of that this side of glory. But there is no mourning and sadness in heaven.

If we allow our grief to overtake us, we've lost sight of our purpose.

Notice he finishes the passage by saying he will abide here 'because it is more needful for you that I'm here.' Believers, you are still here physically and there is something that God wants you to do. If we allow our grief to overtake us, we've lost sight of our purpose. If we're here, then we're here for a reason. Paul shifted his focus away from himself. If I'm honest, much of the grief I experience in life is about ME. But if they're a believer in Christ, where they are is far better! Even in tragedy, it is better for a believer. They wouldn't come back here for anything! Turn back to Psalms Chapter 30.

Psalms 30:10-12 - *“Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper. 11 Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; 12 To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.”*

The psalmist says, 'God, you've taken my mourning and turned it into dancing. You've girded me with gladness.' And what God did for the psalmist, He can do for you! We can move past the mourning. When we're in the midst of it, sometimes it's difficult to see that. Jesus Christ is our hope! It's okay to grieve and sorrow, but not without hope. Don't allow yourself to go to that place of despair but take comfort in the words of God. Put your faith in His promises, knowing that one day we'll be reunited and one day we'll be forever with Christ.

Jesus Christ is our hope!

Ecclesiastes 7:2 - "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart."

The profound truth is when we are mourning, we are faced with our own mortality. There will be a day when people are mourning our loss. Are you prepared to go out into eternity? Do you have the assurance of eternal life? **Believest thou this?**

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† Father, we come to You this morning as a people that frequently experience loss. There are many going through the pain of sorrow and grief and I lift them up to You. I pray that their eyes would be focused on You and the Hope that we have in Christ. Comfort them with the truth and promises of Your Word. We look forward to the day when we're reunited with those we love, but we also look forward to that day when we will be with You forevermore. Thank You for being a God Who cares about us and provides comfort when needed.

We love You, thank You and praise You. We pray all of this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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OVERCOMING LONELINESS

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 – *“Two [are] better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. ¹⁰ For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth; for [he hath] not another to help him up. ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm [alone]? ¹² And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”*

FaceBook, as of 2nd quarter 2020, has 2.7 billion active users. Just 8 years ago in 2012, they just passed the billion member mark. That’s a big number, that’s nearly half the world’s population! Why is that? I think there’s an overwhelming desire in the human makeup to connect; we want to connect with people. We live in the most connected (at least technologically and on social media), we live in the most connected period in history. We are continually engaged or connected in some way ... Instagram, Twitter, whatever ... we are connected! But I think we are the most lonely we’ve ever been. 3 out of 5 Americans say they struggle with loneliness, 60 percent. What we’re going through now as a world is only making that worse – isolated, lonely – it’s going through the roof right now because of the COVID issues and it’s getting worse.

This isn’t only confined to those people who aren’t spiritual.

2Timothy 4:16-17 – *“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all [men] forsook me: [I pray God] that it may not be laid to their charge. ¹⁷ Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and [that] all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”*

He’s talking about his first answer, his first court appearance, and says, ‘I’m alone’. These weren’t casual acquaintances, these were men he had ministered to. But when things got difficult he finds himself standing alone. But the Lord stood with him. That’s a blessed truth, isn’t it? God didn’t forsake Him when others did. How about Jesus? He was alone sometimes.

Matthew 26:56 - *“But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.”*

Again, at that moment in largest need in Jesus’ life, the people that he had poured His life into for the last 3-1/2 years leave him alone. Paul and Jesus had moments of loneliness, but here’s the truth, you’re never truly alone if you’re a believer in JC. Jesus says in **John Chapter 16** --

John 16:32 - *“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”*

Hebrews 13:5 – “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

We are never alone. God is with us and He is all we need.

What a great promise! God wants us to remember He is with us and He is all we need.

As we begin this discussion on loneliness, believers need to remember we are never alone. True friends even left Paul and Jesus, but they were never alone. We may be surrounded by people and still feel lonely. God has an answer for that. He has established a community that we can be part of. All of humanity has been created for community. It is hard-wired into us, to be part of a community. You see it in sports teams, political parties, protests, and something as simple as a book club. We want to be part of something that is larger than ourselves.

Created for Community

Turn back to **Genesis Chapter 2**. This is obviously the creation account. God says something interesting here about Adam --

Genesis 2:18 - “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”

He makes Eve and brings Adam a help meet. This principle isn't only limited to marriage, it deals more with a connection ... that it is somehow hardwired into us to not be alone. Adam hasn't sinned yet, so he's in perfect fellowship with God at this point. There are indications that he and God had daily interactions, perfect fellowship. Yet even in that state, God looks at Adam and says, 'It's not good that Adam is alone.' Even in perfect fellowship with God, we need others in our life.

Does a fish feel wet when you pick it up? I've never had a conversation with a fish ... remember, 'The Incredible Mr. Limpet?' A Don Knotts classic. The fish don't mind being wet but you take them out of the water and I bet they feel dry ... get dry and die. Do you know why a fish doesn't feel wet? Because he's made to be in the water. That's true with us. When we're connecting with others, that feels right; but when we're disconnected with others, it feels wrong. We're created to connect with other people. But all kinds of obstacles get in the way of our community.

There may be a sin problem. When I'm not doing the right thing, I don't want to be around others. I totally disconnect with others.

Obstacles to Community

- Sin Problem
- Pride. I don't want to admit that I need anyone else or I have something I can't get through on my own. “Suck it up, buttercup!”
- Past Hurts. Maybe you got your feelings hurt in a community. You put yourself out there and somebody betrayed you and the natural reaction is for your guard to go up so you don't get hurt again.
- Personality. If your personality is you're a little more quiet or reserved, it may be more difficult for you to put yourself in situations where you're connecting with people. But just because it's more difficult, that doesn't mean we shouldn't connect.

- **Priorities.** If we're honest, maybe it just doesn't matter to you. Our misplaced priorities can get in the way of community.

- **Pace of Life.** When we're running at breakneck speed, we can't connect with others. Being part of community requires time. We stay superficial but we never go deep because it requires an investment of time. Places to go, people to see, but no real connection. All of these obstacles can get in the way of connecting with community and as a result we struggle with loneliness in life. Sometimes those feelings are self-inflicted because of the obstacles that we have.

Benefit of Community

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - *“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? 12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”*

Three simple thoughts – The **Book of Ecclesiastes** was written by King Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived.

Help when I Fall.

Remember the old commercial from Life Call? ‘Help, I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.’ Why can’t you get up? You’re not strong enough and you’re all alone. Sometimes in life, we’re going about our business but then we experience a moment of failure, we’ve fallen, and we need others to help us get up and get back on track. If I’m disconnected and that happens, I’m going to struggle to get back up. But if I’m connected and people are aware of what’s going on in my life and they notice me struggling, they can come alongside of me and help me get up. We need that. We need people in our lives that can help us get back up.

Heat when I’m freezing.

Two soldiers recently talked about being so cold that they were actually willing to spoon with other soldiers! But they said they didn’t care because they were so cold. They were freezing, so it didn’t matter to them. We all have a spiritual temperature. When my spiritual temperature starts to cool, I need to snuggle up next to someone who can revive me spiritually. You might be red-hot for Jesus but the moment you start to disconnect from the body, your temperature starts to cool. You need to re-connect. We need someone that will be there with us to give us heat when we’re freezing ... and we need to do that for other people.

Hero when I’m in a Fight.

We have an enemy in our spiritual life that withstands us and if we try to fight it alone, the enemy will probably prevail. They go after the weak ones, the ones disconnected from the herd. There’s a reason that sheep run in herds. Guess what we are? Sheep. We need one another for protection, for community. We can help each other fight our battles.

Three-fold cord.

Think of a braid. You braid the strands together and it makes a strong rope. Christ winds us together with our brothers in Christ. Community has all types of benefits.

God’s vehicle for community is the church.

God's Vehicle for Community.

God's vehicle for community is the church. There's no shortage of communities that you can belong to. The English word "Church" is translated from Greek, 'Ecclosea', a gathering of people, a congregation getting together for a common purpose. The assembling together of like-minded people gathering for a common purpose. So many believers are becoming dismissive of the importance of church in their lives. As a result, they struggle. Church is so important in our life!

I love the metaphor that God has Paul use in **1Cor. 12**. He talks about this idea of the church being like a human body. He draws parallels between the human body and the organism of the church.

1Corinthians 12:27 - *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."*

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are part of the body and a particular member. Each part has a different function but they work together as one. That metaphor so well describes how the church is to function. You have a role in the church. It's a role that only you can do! God made you to do it. Not only that, you are needed! That's the beautiful part of the church. You are needed! We tend to give more attention to the external parts, but the internal parts are what's more important. What's more important, my hand or my stomach? My heart? As members of the body, we are interdependent with one another. We are trained to be independent, but when it comes to our spiritual life, being independent is a spiritual disaster. I need you and you need me! We need one another; we are interdependent with each other. Being part of a church community makes you part of something bigger than you. You may be the finger, but you're part of the whole body. The body needs the finger so the body can fulfill its purpose. When the finger is gone, the body isn't operating at full efficiency. We need each other to bring maximum glory to Christ. It's not about us fulfilling our purpose, it's about us being part of something that is shining the light on Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22 – *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;²⁰ And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone];²¹ In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:²² In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."*

You are a citizen of heaven if you're a believer in Christ!

In the early church, most of the church were Jewish people. Then Gentiles start to get saved, and Jews and Gentiles came together in one body, one assembly. In the past, the Jews and Gentiles had nothing to do with each other. You are a citizen of heaven if you're a believer in Christ! You are part of the household of God! That's an amazing truth! He knows everything about us and still lets us in! There is a building project going on ... you've got this awesome foundation with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone and now we're building on that foundation and it's all coming together and growing. But it's got to come together. Like Legos, we need to connect and be together as a Body.

Hebrews 10:24-25 – *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another]: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

Paul tells us, as believers, to be involved in a place where you're being provoked ... not in a bad way, but a good way. You ought to be in a place where you're continually being challenged to become better. Walk with me, let's do this together.

We don't learn to love unless we're around people that aren't loveable.

Paul also tells us of the importance of church. If you're not gathering in the church regularly, you are disobeying God. We need to commune. We need to connect. I understand that we can have a laundry list of reasons why we don't want to do that, but do you think God didn't know that? There are challenges in community. Two people together for any length of time causes friction. But we don't learn to love unless we're around people that aren't loveable. We don't learn how to demonstrate grace and mercy until we're around people. We need that! God commands us to do that. Staying connected is a real challenge. Focus on the cause of Christ and staying connected ...

Challenge for Our Community

Twofold challenge –

1st to us individually. Remember you are never alone. Christ is always with you if you're a believer. Sometimes when it comes to connecting with the church, there may be legitimate obstacles in your way that are keeping you from connecting. There's not a person here that hasn't faced that type of situation. But understand that despite that, we need to take personal responsibility for our connectedness. We can't say I've been hurt before and don't want to try again. If you don't have any friends, are you friendly? How you get friends is to be a friend. You can't force yourself into a friendship.

2nd challenge to church – as a body, we have to recognize the importance and value of every member. There's that fleshly side of us that wants to judge the book by its cover. We can't do that; there's no place for that in the Body of Christ. Everybody is welcome, there is no one excluded. Everyone has a contribution to make. It may be dissimilar to what you can do, but there's no room for "clicks" in the Body of Christ. A click becomes clicky when "It's us 4 and no more!" There's no place for that. We have to do our best to shoot down clicks and avoid those.

Proverbs 18:24 - *"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."*

Acts 2:44 – *"And all that believed were together, and had all things common;"*

All that believed were together... they were living in a communal society, selling goods, pooling resources and taking care of those who have need. When you hurt, I should hurt. When you rejoice, I should rejoice ... and likewise. Why? Because we're part of the same body. Church is more than your weekly fix of God! It's connecting intimately with my brothers and sisters in Christ. So important! The church is here to help us find community and connection. The enemy doesn't want that to happen.

Church is more than your weekly fix of God!

Our challenge is individually to make sure we're doing our part to connect; corporately, it's to make sure this is a place where people can come and connect.

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† *Father, I pray for those individuals who are struggling with loneliness and want them to know that You are always with them. I also want them to know that if they are a believer, they are part of the Body of Christ and have a church family who will help and support them. I pray that we, as a church, would be that. Help us to make whatever changes we need to make in our life individually. Help us to live in community. Thank You for allowing us to be together today.*

We pray all of this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. †

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Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpRZFH-oYS8>



OVERCOMING LUST

When I was pastoring in New Jersey, there was an Italian man named Joe with a small, sassy mother named Millie. Millie had a sweet tooth, but she was a diabetic. Over time, she lost one of her legs from diabetes. But even with the constant reminder of her lost leg, she was not able to overcome that craving, that lust, that was within her.

When we hear the word “lust” we tend to apply it in a sexual context, but it could be *anything* in life. To lust is to be preoccupied with something until it affects your perspective on anything else. It begins to overtake any other outlook in your life. Lust can also be a good thing; it’s not always bad. It can be something good but taken to the wrong degree.

Scripture categorizes sin into 3 broad categories:

1John 2:16 - *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”*

1) Lust of flesh, 2) lust of eyes, 3) pride of life. God sent His Son to save us from our sin. God wants us to overcome our sin and provides examples and truths from His Word that help us to do that. As believers, Israel is a picture of the individual believer in Christ. When we read about them (Israel) as a nation, they picture for us an individual believer.

1Corinthians 10:1-6 – *“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ² And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ And did all eat the same spiritual meat; ⁴ And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. ⁵ But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”*

Verse 6 above – “our examples”. Why? “to the intent we should not lust after evil things.” God says the things that I wrote about Israel, those things were recorded so we won’t fall subject to the same lusts they did. In **Numbers 11**, Israel is not doing well ...

Numbers 11:4 - *“And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?”*

Crucifying the Lust of our Flesh

Exodus 12:38 - *“And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.”*

A group of Egyptians came with the Israelites, a mixed multitude. They caused the Israelites all kinds of problems and caused them to stumble in their walk. Crucify your lusts -- if you don't, there will be internal warfare.

James 4:1 - *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?”*

You want to know why you have conflict in your life? It's because you've got a battle going on inside of you – a battle between the old nature and the new nature.

Galatians 5:24-25 – *“And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”*

The enemy has lost our soul. There's nothing he can do to change that. You're going to heaven if you're saved, so he's lost that battle. But now he wants to make us ineffective with our walk with Christ. How does he do that? *interferes in our walk*. There's no room in the Christian life for mixed multitudes. Our lives should be driven by walking in the Spirit of God. Our flesh is not tamable. It has to be crucified, done away with. There's no good thing that dwells in our flesh.

Romans 7:18 - *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”*

Numbers 11:5-6 - *“We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: 6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.”*

They're thinking about the good ol' days ... cucumbers, melons, leeks ... problem is, our memories get tainted over time. The good ol' days aren't as good as you think they were. “Freely” – can I remind you that they were slaves in Egypt? They weren't free! They were under the taskmaster's whip! Anything they ate, their master gave them to eat. But they're looking back and thinking about all the fish, onions, garlic ... and bad breath! and we freely ate that. NO! You were in bondage, in slavery! When we get into our journey with Christ, we start thinking about the “good times” we used to have ... and we forget we were a slave, in bondage.

Focusing on the Lust of our Flesh

Ephesians 2:2-3 – *“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:³ Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”*

Titus 2:11-12 – *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;”*

Before you came to Christ, you were walking in the lusts of your flesh. You obeyed it, you fulfilled the desires of it. God’s wrath was upon you! The good old days aren’t what we make them out to be.

The Christian life may not provide the temporal pleasures the world offers, but it also doesn’t bring the bondage the world offers.

Sometimes we view our Christian life as dry and boring. If that’s your attitude, you’re not doing it right! If it’s boring, it’s because **you’re** boring! The Christian life is **not** boring! It may not provide the temporal pleasures the world offers, but it also doesn’t bring the bondage the world offers. “Nothing but this manna” – you mean the supernatural manna that God rained from heaven? 4,500 tons of manna every day ... **that manna?** That’s what you’re talking about? They lost sight of the miracle.

Psalms 106:13-14 – *“They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: ¹⁴ But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.”*

They soon forgot His works! God supernaturally provides for us and we soon forget what He’s done. You mean God, who became flesh and came to earth and died for you ... and rose again ... that “boring” God? You mean that Holy Spirit of God, the Creator of all ... **that** boring God? They’re not asking for meat because they’re hungry. They’re full, they just want something different. Something else would be better, tastier, more satisfying. Same thing happens to us -- we get full ... God fills us with His Spirit ... and oftentimes we still turn our attention and say, ‘Man, it would be nice to have something different.’

Numbers 11:10, 18-20 - *“Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased...¹⁸ And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. ¹⁹ Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; ²⁰ But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?”*

It never ends well when God is angry! As a result of this lust, God tells Moses to give them flesh to eat until it comes out their nostrils ... because they despised the Lord and complained.

Being Given Over to the Lust of our Flesh

That’s what you’re crying about? God says, ‘I’m going to give it to you and let’s see how that goes for you.’ It’s not mean-spirited or vengeful ... it’s equivalent of a parent watching their child making a bad choice.

Psalms 81:10-16 – “I [am] the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. ¹¹ But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. ¹² So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: [and] they walked in their own counsels. ¹³ Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, [and] Israel had walked in my ways! ¹⁴ I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. ¹⁵ The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. ¹⁶ He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.”

God told them He'd take care of them, but they wouldn't listen – like a parent and a child. God gives them up and they walk in their own counsels. At this point, they are on the brink of going into the Promised Land ... but they don't want to listen.

Psalms 106:13-15 – “They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: ¹⁴ But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. ¹⁵ And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

Verse 15 – He gave them their request but they weren't fulfilled, they weren't satisfied. All of us have lusts in our flesh, things we desire, but in an inappropriate way. How often have we gotten the thing that we wanted and once we had it, we wanted more or we wanted something else. You know why? Because you can't satisfy your flesh. It always wants more. That's why people find themselves addicted to things. God says ok, I'll answer that request for you ... but they experience a leanness of soul and are not satisfied.

You can't satisfy your flesh. It always wants more.

Numbers 11:31-32 – “And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let [them] fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits [high] upon the face of the earth. ³² And the people stood up all that day, and all [that] night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread [them] all abroad for themselves round about the camp.”

Check that out! Look at God ... He's saying alright ... and He causes a wind to come and brings quail, so many! But at the end of **Verse 32** it says, they spread them out *for themselves*.

Psalms 78:27-29 – “He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: ²⁸ And he let [it] fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. ²⁹ So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire;”

Lust, at its core, is selfish.

Lust, at its core, is selfish. It's about me and what I want. I'm not worried about how it's going to impact anybody else, I just want what I want. It's the terrible 2-year-old that lives within every one of us. It leaves us lean in our soul; it doesn't satisfy us, doesn't fulfill us. Usually the opposite is true ... once we have it, we feel horrible! It ends up having the opposite effect that we think it's going to have.

Numbers 11:33-35 - *“And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague. 34 And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted. 35 And the people journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah unto Hazeroth; and abode at Hazeroth.”*

Burying the Lusts of our Flesh

Kibroth-hattaavah = “graves of lusts”

You either bury your lusts or they will bury you.

That is where lusts ultimately leads us ... to the grave. You either bury your lusts or they will bury you. We have to crucify them and reckon them dead and buried with Christ. These people are literally having a banquet in the grave. There is always a consequence associated with giving in to our lusts. Always. That payment may not come immediately, but there is always a price that will be paid. We have to know that!

Ephesians 4:22 - *“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;”*

The lusts of our flesh are deceitful. They hold up that tempting thing and it looks so good but it's all a deception. It's like the bullfighter with the red flag ... as soon as you come charging at it, you fall into the grave.

1 Timothy 6:9 - *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”*

The lusts of our flesh are hurtful. They deceive us and will bury us if we allow them to. Like how the Alaskans deal with wolves ... they bury a bloody knife in the snow and the wolves find it and lick it until it cuts their mouth. By the time they get to the sharp blade, their mouth is frozen so they are actually licking up their own blood and don't even realize it ... and bleed to death. Gross but true.

James 1:14-15 – *“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. ¹⁵ Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”*

Bury your lusts or they will bury you! Crucify your flesh.

Life works best within the boundaries that God has established.

Hazeroth means “courts” or “yards” -- surrounded by a stone wall. Hazeroth means the boundaries God has set up in our lives. They moved there and abode there.

A dog runs at the end of its leash. Believers sometimes think they're missing out on something; that satisfaction is on the other side, but God knows what's best for us. He doesn't establish boundaries because He's mean-spirited. Life works best within the boundaries that God has established. Don't allow the fleshly lustful desires to control us, but walk in the Spirit of God, crucifying the flesh. Put that old man, once and for all, into the grave. Abide in Hazeroth.

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† *Father, we need You so desperately. Thank You for the salvation we have in Christ. Forgive us when we view Your supernatural provision as boring. I pray that You would help us to never lose sight of what You've done for us; that we would move away from living for self; that we would always remember the consequences of making lustful decisions and that we would strive to live closer to You, within Your boundaries.*

We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. †

Hymn - Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

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Watch: https://youtu.be/mkLpUO1OUms?list=PLjS_-6zoVu2h75ZUFxdIU2SVwb6-yJsc



OVERCOMING ENVY

With over 25 years in the ministry, I've had occasion to help people struggling with many issues, but I can't recall anyone ever asking for help with a problem with **envy**. Is it because it's not a problem with some of us? We know that envy is found in our flesh, we all have a carnal nature. This is one of those more subtle sins, isn't it?

There are two words that come to mind when talking about envy: **Jealousy** and **envy**. *Jealousy* is a fear that you'll lose something valuable to you. It's based in fear. Envy, on the other hand, is anger because someone else got what I wanted or what I think I deserved. Envy is that sin that says you've been treated unfairly. I believe that attitude sometimes creeps into all of our lives.

Let's look at a couple of examples from the Bible:

Genesis 26:14 - *"For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him."*

Talking about Isaac – we can envy others' financial successes. Isaac is being blessed. Look at **Verses 12-13** before that –

Genesis 26:12-13 – *"Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. ¹³ And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great."*

Isaac had to work for what he had. He sowed in that land. Who blessed him? The Lord.

Psalms 37:1-7 – *"([A Psalm] of David.) Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. ² For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. ³ Trust in the LORD, and do good; [so] shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. ⁴ Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. ⁵ Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring [it] to pass. ⁶ And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. ⁷ Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass."*

Even TV shows ... such as "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and some of the home improvement shows ... can create envy in us.

We can envy others' financial blessings

Genesis 26:12-13 – *“Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. ¹³ And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great.”*

We can envy others' family blessings

Genesis 30:1 - *“And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.”*

Genesis 30:2 - *“And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?”*

Social media helps our envy – look at their family, look at their house, look at the cool vacation they got to take. Remember that social media is the highlights of someone's life. You're not videotaping when your kid's having a temper tantrum. The tendency within us is to look at someone's social media and think their life is rosey. But they have the same challenges as you do. If we're not careful, we become envious of them and maybe even start to take pleasure in their trials. It's easy to get twisted up.

Remember that social media is the highlights of someone's life.

We can envy others' favor

Genesis 37:9-11 – *“And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. ¹⁰ And he told [it] to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What [is] this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? ¹¹ And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.”*

The story of Joseph ... we can get to the point where we envy others' favor. Joseph's brothers are envious of him because Joseph was daddy's favorite. Envy is always directed toward those above us, or someone who is our peer that's getting ahead of us. This happens in all arenas of life. Pastors can become envious of other pastors. *“How come they get a new building? They must be compromising! We stick to the truth ...”* See how it works? This is the very reason that the Pharisees delivered Christ to be crucified. They wanted to be in charge, they wanted to rule ... and they knew he was King.

Mark 15:10 - *“For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.”*

Let's look at the Book of Psalms --

Psalms 37:1-7 - *“Fret not thyself because of evildoers, Neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. 2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb. 3 Trust in the Lord, and do good; So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. 4 Delight thyself also in the Lord; And he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 5 Commit thy way unto the Lord; Trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. 6 And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, And thy judgment as the noonday. 7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, Because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”*

What’s the big deal?

Proverbs 27:4 - *“Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?”*

Two huge sins: wrath, anger ... but no one can stand in the face of envy. A scripture example is David and Saul. Saul was King and they were returning from battle and the women said David had slain more men. Saul becomes envious to the point that he tries to stick David to the wall. David has to flee because Saul is going to kill him.

Job 5:2 - *“For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.”*

Envy is for the silly and it will slay you.

Envy is for the silly and it will slay you. When we engage in envy toward someone else, we are acting in a silly way and it will harm us.

Proverbs 14:30 - *“A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.”*

There is no redeeming quality in envy! There is no good thing associated with envy; it is bad throughout. It will eat you from the inside out, it will destroy you, cause you to become bitter and blind you to your own gifts and blessings.

1Corinthians 3:3 - *“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”*

The church at Corinth was a church filled with issues. One of the problems is they were being carnal. Envy is a sign of carnality... that I am in the flesh, not in the spirit. We are not to walk in the flesh, we are not to be carnal. We are to walk after things of the spirit.

1Peter 2:1 - *“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,”*

We are commanded to lay envies aside, put it away. It is the equivalent of Paul saying, “Put off the old man and put on the new man.” Visit God’s Word and let it grow you spiritually.

How to overcome envy...

Go back to Psalms 37:3 – *“Trust in the Lord, and do good; So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”*

Trust in the Lord

Key word: Humility. Pride oftentimes drives envy. We are not entitled, that is pride. Humble yourself.

Don't allow pride to run the show.

James 4:5-8 – *“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? ⁶ But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse [your] hands, [ye] sinners; and purify [your] hearts, [ye] double minded.”*

If we humble ourselves, God will give us grace to overcome. When we're envious, we begin to protest against God's provision in our life and we become envious of others.

Delight in the Lord

Delight in Him versus self and the things of this world. Contentment. Our discontentment makes us wallow in our self pity and makes of envious of others. We become too focused on the external things. Delight in the Lord, He is enough!

We've got God ... that's enough! He is sufficient!

Hebrews 13:5 - *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”*

Conversation = lifestyle. Be content with what He's given you because God is enough for you! Don't allow covetousness to creep in. Be happy with what God has given you. Rest in that! Be content! Envy has the quality of never being satisfied. Focus on God.

Commit Your Way to the Lord

2Corinthians 10:12 - *“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”*

Commit your life to the Lord. Surrender. Surrender your life to the Lord. Whatever comes my way, whatever challenges I face, whatever obstacles appear in my life, I'm surrendered to the Lord. We have this faulty notion that if I'm living the way that I should live and doing the things God wants me to do that everything's going to go well with me. That's not true! It's not. Sometimes the very opposite of that is true. But if we're surrendered to Him, whatever comes our way is OK.

Pastor Mark Trotter posted on Facebook ... he is battling cancer ... his post said this: “It wasn't what we had hoped for but it is obviously what the Lord wants us to glorify Him in, so we're pressing on.” That's *surrender*, that's committing my way under Him. That's why Paul said, *“I know how to abound and I know how to be abased.”*

I can do all things through Christ!

Respond in the Lord

Whatever comes my way, help me to respond to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 10:12 - “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”

Don't compare yourself to others. Two things happen: self-loathing or self-righteousness. God has a path for us! **Every single person has a path from God and it doesn't have anything to do with someone else's path.** Focus on what God has for YOU to do. He wants YOU to live a life that glorifies Him. Be fully surrendered to Him. Commit your way unto Him.

Rest in the Lord

Psalms 37

Rest in the Lord, knowing maybe it's not going to be fair in this life but it's going to be ok. We need to keep following Him. It's all going to be over soon; rest in Him. Wait patiently for Him.

Psalms 73:23-26 – “Nevertheless I [am] continually with thee: thou hast holden [me] by my right hand.²⁴ Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me [to] glory.²⁵ Whom have I in heaven [but thee]? and [there is] none upon earth [that] I desire beside thee.²⁶ My flesh and my heart faileth: [but] God [is] the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

Asaph says he almost fell because of this ... what's the point of doing the right thing? But when he went into the house of the Lord, he understood that it would all work out.

God is calling you and me to rest in Him. In Him, we are **overcomers** and we have an eternal home in heaven if we've put our trust in Jesus Christ. We have no reason to be envious! Resting in the Lord enables us to rejoice in the blessings of other people.

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† Father, help us to overcome envy and remind us that we should put our trust in You, that we should rest and delight in You and commit our ways to You. Help us to get to the point where we rejoice in the blessings of others. Thank You for the assurance of eternal life and our home in heaven.

We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. †

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Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsKb4QXb-V8>



OVERCOMING APATHY

Revelation 3:15-18 – *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. ¹⁷ Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: ¹⁸ I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”*



I stopped at QuikTrip this morning and picked up a couple of beverages – a cup of hot coffee and an ice-cold glass of tea. I got these maybe 45 minutes ago, but the moment I poured the coffee into the cup and the tea into the glass, they started to move towards being lukewarm, to move toward room temperature.

Scripture has a word to describe this – lukewarm. Does that describe your faith – lukewarm? It did a church in Laodicea in the Bible. Go ahead and open your Bibles to **Revelation Chapter 3**. In **Revelation Chapters 2 and 3**, John writes to 7 different churches, each with different characteristics, and the 7th of those letters is written to the church of Laodicea. That word “Laodicea” means “rights of the people.” It was a place where people were more concerned with their rights than with doing what God wants them to do. In this letter, he doesn’t say anything good about the church at Laodicea.

Revelation 3:15-16 - *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”*

Paul tells us that this church at Laodicea had a faith that was lukewarm. Their works, the way they lived their Christian life, was lukewarm because they were living lukewarm. Another word for lukewarm is “apathy”. Apathy is a big struggle area for Christianity today.

Apathy is the absence of or suppression of passion, a lack of interest in or concern for.

We hate apathy! If you’re a manager at work, do you really like apathetic employees? Do you like it when your waiter or waitress is apathetic? Apathy in our spiritual life makes Jesus sick. That’s what He said in **Rev. 3:16**, isn’t it? In light of what God has done for us, you can understand why our apathy might make Him sick! He’s given us eternal life, He’s given us a purpose for living ... He’s God Almighty, He reigns over all creation ... and we go, ‘Ehhh, whatever!’

“Whatever” is an apathetic word. When we respond to God with apathy, we can understand why He might not enjoy that very much. Being lukewarm requires some intentionality on our part. Left to ourselves, we naturally drift toward the middle. These two beverages are eventually going to be the same temperature. Something’s got to happen to make it different.

Am I Laodicean? Am I lukewarm? Look at **Verse 17** --

Revelation 3:17 - *“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:”*

Need of nothing ... that also includes God. To me, this is the scariest verse in this entire passage because He tells us if we’re Laodicean, we’re prone to self-deception. We don’t even know it. We’ve deceived ourselves into thinking that we’re something that we’re not.

Here are some things to consider that might make us lukewarm --

- ***You’re as close to Jesus as you want to be.*** He didn’t move. You did. We have to work at the relationship, invest in the relationship. If you’re not applying yourself and working at the relationship, if your focus is on temporal things, you might be lukewarm in your faith.
- ***If you only think about God when you’re in a bind,*** you might be lukewarm. “Spare tire Christianity.” A lot of people only think about God when they have a problem. He’ll be there when you have a need ... but what kind of relationship would you have with your spouse or friends if you only contacted them when you needed something? Sometimes that’s the way we use God. I’ve got an issue, let me ring up the Big Guy!
- ***If I only serve or give when it’s convenient for me,*** I might be lukewarm in my faith. Die to self and follow Him.
- I might be lukewarm ***if I feel good when I compare my spirituality to others.***
- ***If you find yourself the “al a carte” Christian – pick and choose which parts of Scripture you want to live out ...*** you might be Laodicean.
- ***If you profess that God is real but your lifestyle dictates something else,*** you might be lukewarm.

How do I overcome spiritual apathy? How do we stay hot instead of lukewarm? Let’s look at some ways to do that.

Get to Know the True Nature of God

When I understand His true character, I can move to where I need to be spiritually. He begins each of the seven letters to the church of Laodicea with a similar statement --

“Amen, faithful & true witness, beginning of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14)

The letters are saying, “I am this person, I am telling you this is Who I Am ...”

**When I grow in the knowledge of what
God has done, I can't be apathetic.**

Turn to **Isaiah Chapter 6** -

Isaiah 6:1, 5, 8 - *"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple... 5Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts...8Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."*

King Uzziah has died ... even a prophet, a man of God, ordained to deliver a message to God's people ... even he could grow in the understanding of God. He sees God in a new way. He'd never experienced anything like this before. The prophet Isaiah experiences God in a new way, lifted high and sitting on His throne. As a result of seeing God in this new way, he has a new view of himself. "Undone" means "ruined" in the best possible way. He sees God in all of His majesty and it changes Isaiah, the prophet. He will never be the same and knows he will be different after seeing God for Who He Is and what He's capable of. His view of himself changed, didn't it? Sometimes we get a little prideful, arrogant. Sometimes we begin to think we're something that we're not. Isaiah was a godly man, but when he saw God, he saw himself as just a guy with unclean lips. Not only did it change his view of God and self, but now he says 'I've got a job to do.' When we meet God, when we begin to understand Who He is and what He's done, your life will never be the same. He's looking for us ... say 'Send me, I'll go.'

I wasn't born Pastor Brad, but when I was 20 years old, I met God and my life has never been the same. God shows up and I see Him in different ways and it just keeps changing. I don't live the way I used to. God has given me and you a purpose ... and He wants us to "go". It moves us from lukewarm to hot.

Get Rid of Your Divided Heart

Even if you're here and you're apathetic in your Christianity, you're not apathetic in every area of your life. There's something in your life that you're passionate about. But we need to make sure that we're passionate about the **right** thing ... the things of God. It's easy to get distracted in life, with the things of life.

Life is like a buffet. Ever been to a Brazilian buffet? One day while on a mission trip, we were out spending a day in Brazil, playing in the water and we were tired and famished. So we stopped at this buffet. We were all seated at this huge table and they bring out the soup, then they bring a salad, then all these different types of meats ... we inhaled all of it ... and they bring out filet mignon, but we were so full by that time that we felt like we were going to pop! We didn't know the filet was coming and filled up on the stupid salad! We settled for less because we didn't know what was coming. The restaurant knew what they were doing! It's not necessarily that we're spending our life doing bad things, but we're giving ourselves over to things that aren't the best. So when it comes to God, we miss out on the best because we have a divided heart. It's not possible to serve two masters.

Matthew 6:24 - *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”*

1Kings 18:21 - *“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.”*

Elijah says to God’s people, ‘How long are we going to stop between two opinions? How long are we going to stay in the middle?’ If Baal is God, knock yourself out, go for it. But if God is God, follow Him! Because you’re in the middle, you’re stuck. *We’ve got to get rid of this divided heart, trying to serve God and the world at the same time.* We drift towards what we’re looking at. If our eyes are on the world and all it has to offer, we are going to be concerned with the things of this life. **We need to focus on God and things eternal.**

Proverbs 4:23, 25-27 - *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life... 25Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. 26Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. 27Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.”*

2Corinthians 4:18 - *“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

What are you looking at? What are you drifting toward? Material things or heavenly things?

Revelation 3:18 - *“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”*

This is interesting. Now he’s counseling them to change their perspective and look at the eternal things. **Have a vision for what God wants you to do.**

Get in Touch with God’s Purpose for your life

Revelation 3:20 - *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”*

When I lose sight of God’s purpose for my life, I become apathetic and lose my enthusiasm. “In Theos = In God.”

God Almighty, this HUGE God, all-powerful, all-knowing God has a plan for YOU. Something He wants YOU to do. I can’t do it for you, only YOU can do what God made you to do. That’s an amazing thought, that He took time to create a purpose for my life. Ultimately, we are ALL created to bring God glory. *Are you glorifying God in your life?* Or have you become apathetic towards God? Have you lost sight of God’s purpose for our life? When we think about God’s purpose for our life, we think it must be grandiose. Not always. But **we accomplish God’s purpose for our life one step at a time.** Do you know the next step He wants you to take? Don’t hesitate to do it. He wants us to have

a servant's heart. Faithfully take that next step and trust He will reveal the next step to you. Ask Him to show you. He will give you enough Light for the next step and says 'trust Me in the next step.'

What is holding you back? What keeps us from taking the next step? Most often it is **fear**. We're afraid of losing control. A little secret: **You're not in control anyway!** We're afraid of the unknown, we don't want to fall. Or maybe it's fear of what others might think. But we need to live intentionally in our life if we want to move from the middle. Be intentional in getting to know Him, in discovering what His purpose for us is. He wants us to have a dynamic life, a dynamic faith.

Verse 19 – as many as I love, I rebuke ... why? *Because I love you.* I will tell you when things aren't going the way they should be going and allow that zeal to drive you towards repentance.

'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' ... God is knocking on your door. But He's not going to MAKE you do something. He's just knocking and waiting for you and me to open the door and invite Him in. He's not going to barge in, He just wants you to open the door and move from this place of apathy in the middle to hot. Maybe you used to be hot but over time you've drifted towards that middle place. **All you've got to do is open the door and let Him in.**

One of the most perplexing things in my own life is I believe in God. *Do you?* Do you believe in the truth of Scripture? I do. Do you believe Jesus is God in the flesh? That He was buried and rose again, seated on the right hand of the Father? That He's coming back and that could happen any moment? But oftentimes I live like I don't believe any of that. That truth needs to make its way from our heads into our hearts. The way that happens is we answer the door and let Him come in. Our natural state is "lukewarm". Only God can move us out where we're hot and cold again. We've got to allow Him to do that in our lives. Don't allow the temperature of modern-day Christianity to pull you towards the middle. ***Begin living passionately for your Lord and Saviour!***

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† *Father, we come to You and want to repent. These are hard truths that we live in the spiritual equivalent of the Laodicean church. But Lord, we don't want to live in the middle. We want to be hot for You. We are drawn to the middle and confess that to You. We hear you knocking on the door of our heart and I pray that we would unlock all the locks and allow You to come in, come to know You more; help us to let go of the division in our hearts and get in touch with Your purpose for our lives. Ignite a flame in our hearts; do something special in our lives; become more real to us. We love You and we pray we can live like we love You.*

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. †

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