

Living a
TRANSFORMED
LIFE



LEARNING TO POSSESS ABUNDANT LIFE
IN CHRIST

Living a **T** R A N S F O R M E D L I F E

LEARNING TO POSSESS ABUNDANT LIFE
IN CHRIST



Written by Lyle E. Mullins
Copyright © Heaven Sent Ministries 2015
All rights reserved

All scripture references are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved
worldwide.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Thus begins the story of creation in the book of Genesis. In the first few chapters of this book of beginnings, we are given a glimpse of how God orchestrates and carries out His great cosmic plan. Beginning with the separation of light and darkness, water and land, plants and animals, He culminates with the pinnacle of His creation—man.

Adam, the first man, is given his place on the earth, in the garden of Eden. God then creates Eve to be his mate. They are instructed by God to enjoy and have dominion over this garden paradise. There is one prohibition, however. Within the garden there are two special trees. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God instructs Adam to eat freely from any tree in the garden, including the tree of life but not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He tells Adam that if he does, “you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

In chapter 3, a dramatic shift in the narrative takes place. The introduction of the serpent, the embodiment of evil, sets the stage for the saddest day in all of creation. Falling prey to the cunning trap set by the serpent, Adam ate from the forbidden tree. As a result, he suffered the heartbreaking loss of intimacy with his Creator, climaxing with his loss of innocence and his dominion over creation. Awakened in him was a sinister darkness that weaved itself into his mind, unleashing a plague of sin and death that would ultimately affect all of mankind. It was an evil undoing by the serpent, used by Satan, to lead man in rebellion against God. God, however, would not be thwarted nor would he allow His creation to be doomed forever, He would have the last word.

Satan’s cunning attack to destroy man was crushed through the love and sacrifice of God. It was orchestrated through His eternal plan to redeem mankind, a plan that culminated on the Cross of Christ more than 2000 years ago. The death and resurrection of Christ, gave man the opportunity to return to his Creator. Once again he could stand before him in innocence through a relationship with Christ. And once again he could triumph over the power of the enemy.

Through the transforming power of the gospel a new life is available to all who will put their trust in Christ.

It is a transformation brought about by the Spirit of God. It is a journey of spiritual growth. It is a journey of becoming like Christ. It is, indeed, an epic adventure of abundant life in Him.

Knowing who we are in Christ is essential for spiritual growth and abundant life. It is impossible to circumvent this fundamental understanding of identification without jeopardizing our journey of becoming like Him. Spiritual ignorance will impede our ability to discern the dangers lurking in the shadows of darkness and blind us to the strategy of the enemy to ensnare us. Knowing the truth, on the other hand, will alert us to his schemes.

What are the effects of knowing the truth? **These are the facts:** Satan no longer has dominion over your life; he has no authority over you because you belong to Christ; you have been brought out of death into life. Paul explains; “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph 2:2,3). In other words, Satan was our master and ruler—we were slaves without hope.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (4,5). He released us from our captor granting us freedom to live a new life in Christ.

If Satan can rob you of this knowledge, he will keep you in bondage preventing you from maintaining intimacy with Christ, thus hindering your spiritual growth. The result will leave you like a ship without a rudder, tossed about and unable to navigate the twists and turns of life.

The truth is, God gives us the ability to overcome any obstacle to our spiritual development. Clearly, the Bible states that it is God’s intention to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). With this in mind, let us go on to maturity. Let us take hold of all that we have and all that we are in Christ. Let us fight the good fight of faith and finish the race before us.

THE LOSS



OF INNOCENCE

The fall of man in the opening chapters of Genesis is the epic story of how man forfeited the true love of his Creator for carnal knowledge, intimacy with God for temporal pleasure, and eternal life for a life plagued with sin and death. It also chronicles the unconditional love, unwavering commitment, and amazing grace of God in His pursuit of fallen man. It is the story of redemption and restoration, and God's faithfulness toward His creation. It is the greatest story ever told.

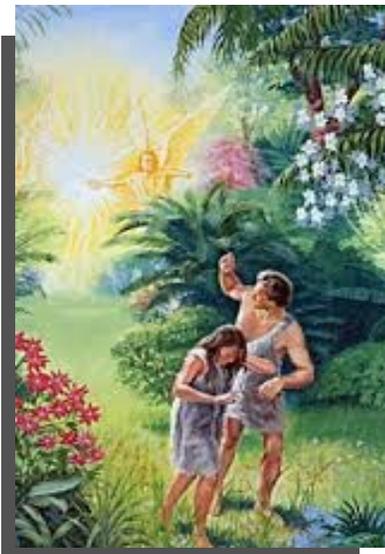
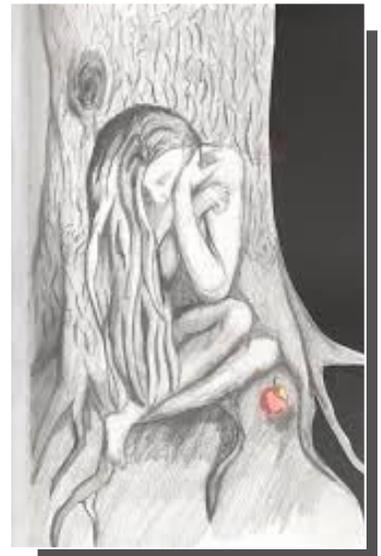
The Dark Side Of Eden

When Adam was created in the Garden of Eden, he was given everything he needed to enjoy life at its fullest. In addition to having a relationship with God that was real and personal, he was also given a woman to be his life's mate. Together they found meaning and purpose in tending the beautiful garden paradise created for them. God gave them only one prohibition: Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, planted in the garden paradise.

The consequence: the day you eat of it you will surely die (Gen 2:17).

A Deadly Alliance

Little did they know that their arch enemy, Satan, was planning a devastating attack that would test their willingness to obey God. With cunning and precision, Satan struck. Using the serpent as his seductive weapon, he lured Eve to disobey God by tempting her to eat from the forbidden tree. Eve believed the deceptive serpent's lie—"you will not surely die" (Gen 3:4) and yielded to the temptation. She then persuaded Adam to join her in eating the deadly fruit. The result: An unholy rebellion against God was unleashed; *a rebellion that would affect all of mankind.*



Paradise Lost

The first couple found themselves separated from God, having lost all that He had planned for them, They were banned from His presence and from the garden paradise. Immersed in a world cursed by sin, they no longer had dominion over creation and were no longer free to enjoy intimacy with the One who created them. They would now be buffeted by Satan, the enemy of their soul. For the rest of their lives they would be dominated by sin and death.

From Tragedy To Triumph

A new world government had now been established. The earth was under new management. The prince of the power of the air would now direct the sons of disobedience. Before man is the drama of life without God. It is paradise lost in the truest sense. It is the beginning of strife and turmoil, suffering and death. It is, without a doubt, the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind.

But it set into motion the ultimate rescue mission. A divine undertaking to recover what was lost in the garden—man's freedom, dominion, and intimacy with God. It began immediately after the fall. It was a plan, however, that was forged before the foundation of the world. A plan in which Christ gave Himself over to suffering and death. A plan in which He, once and for all, crushed the head of the enemy, defeating sin and death. It was the eternal plan of God to redeem His highest creation.



Culminating on a cross more than two thousand years ago, God demonstrated His sacrificial love by becoming a man. God the Son laid aside His eternal glory and entered the world. He humbled Himself to live a perfect sinless life on the earth so that He could be the ultimate sacrifice for sin. His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection three days later defeated Satan's strategy to destroy mankind, thus releasing him from his deadly captor. By paying the supreme price for man's sin, Christ afforded the opportunity for all who believe in Him to be free from sin and death.

Here man encounters restoration and renewal to God. Here he is given the grace of God to live an intimate and victorious life in Christ. And it is here that he finds abundant life.

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 Jn 4:10).



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Let's recap by answering the questions below.

- 1) What was the root cause that led Eve to disobey God in the garden?

- 2) What was the end result of Adam and Eve's disobedience?

- 3) What was God's solution to their dilemma?

When the serpent asked Eve, "Did God really say..." and then said, "You will not surely die", he put doubt into Eve's mind that perhaps God was withholding something from her. Do you identify with Eve? Do you believe that God withholds from you?

Examine the following Scriptures. How do they compare with your answers?

James 1:17

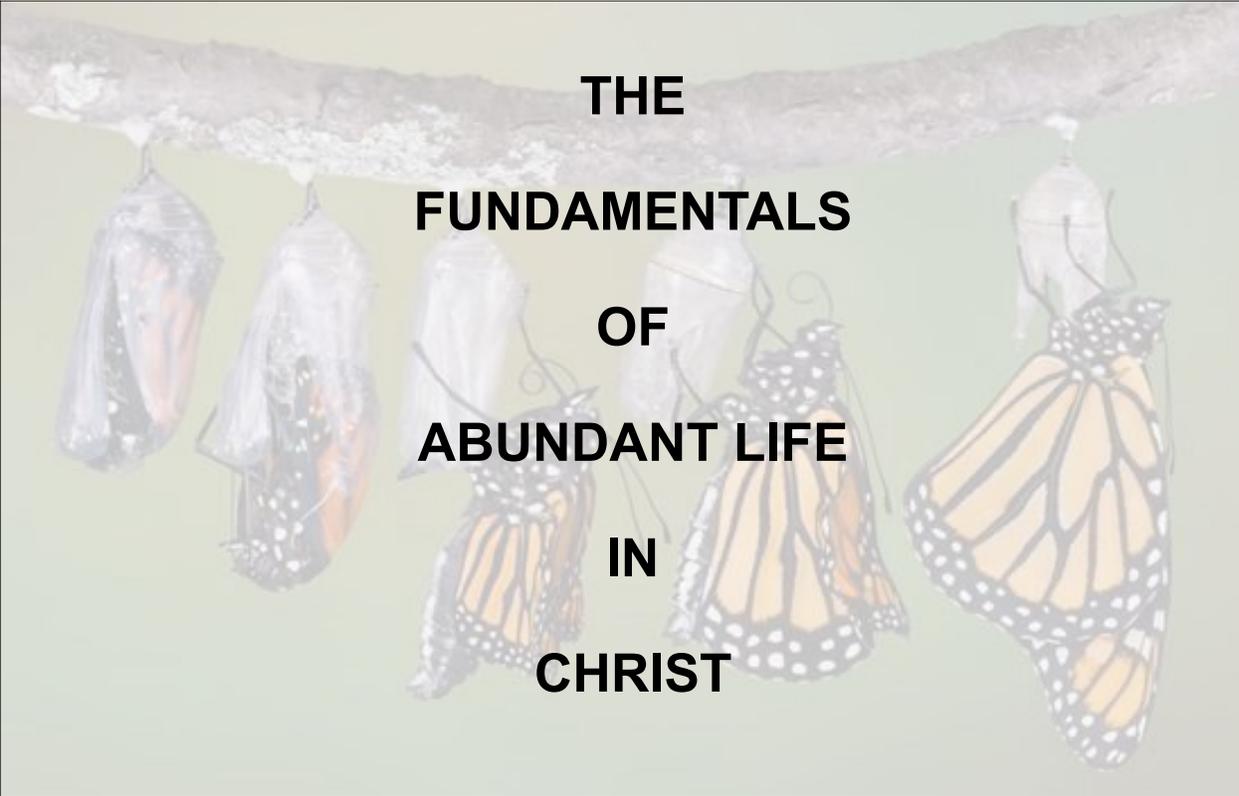
Romans 8:31

Psalm 38:9-10

Psalm 84:11

Share your answers with your group.

NOTES



A New Land

Abundance In Canaan

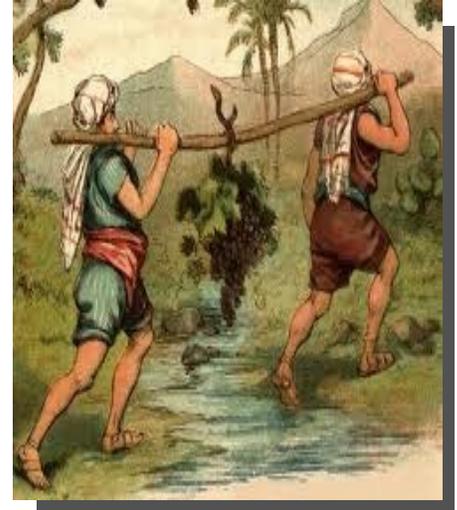
The Promised Land

The abundant life in Christ can be likened to Canaan, the land given to the people of Israel by God. It was a prosperous land having everything the people needed.

A land of plenty



Flowing with
milk and honey
(Num 14:8)



It was also a land filled with giants and enemies that needed to be conquered. God promised the people, however, that He would defeat all their enemies if they would trust Him. All they had to do was take possession of the land. They were charged by God to enter in and possess it by faith.

A land to possess



The people who dwell in
the land are strong.
(Num 13:28)

A New Life

Abundance In Christ

Abundant life in Christ is also entered by faith. God, in turn, gives us everything we need to possess it. In love, He gives us His best and directs every step of our journey. He equips us from the storehouse of heaven so that we can defeat every foe that comes against us.

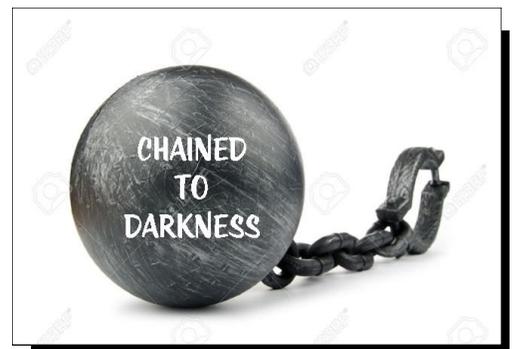
Abundant life in Christ doesn't mean that we will have everything we want, however. It doesn't necessarily infer that we will be financially blessed. It doesn't imply that we will not be subject to disease and sickness, or that we will be immune from trouble and sorrow. When Jesus made the statement, "I came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10), He was intimating something much deeper and more meaningful.

In fact, He came to rescue us from far more than the temporal problems we face in this world: He came to give meaning to life itself. He came to transform our lives by the Spirit of God. He came to give us an overcoming, victorious life that makes it possible for us to forsake all and to follow Him.

Out With The Old—In With The New

What does it mean to have a new life in Christ? Take note of these words in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Notice the contrast in old and new. What is the old and what is the new referred to in the passage? The answers are interspersed throughout the pages of the New Testament and are discovered through study. Our journey through these passages reveals the truths that transform us into a true disciple of Christ. On the one hand, they tell us who we were before we came to Christ, and on the other, they declare to us who we are in Him. Until we understand from the Word the total helplessness of former our condition, we cannot fully comprehend the greatness of where God, through Christ, has brought us.

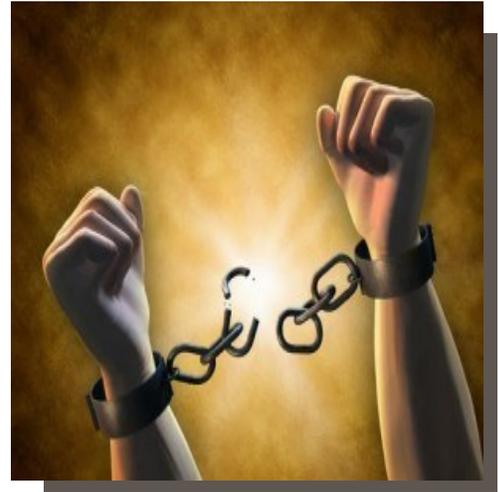
The "old" represents the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of Satan. This is where everyone dwelt prior to coming into a relationship with Christ. The Bible is explicit in telling us what our condition was in that kingdom: We were separated from Christ (Eph 2:12), spiritually dead in sin (Eph 2:1), a slave to sin (Rom 6:20), controlled by our sinful nature (Rom 7:5), a slave to fear (Rom 8:15), condemned to judgment (Jn 3:18), separated from the life of God (Eph 4:18), without hope (Eph 2:12) and we were darkness (Eph 5:8). A sad state of affairs, indeed! But because of the grace of God he rescued us from that terrible domain.



When He delivered us, He also transferred us into another kingdom—a kingdom of love and abundance. A kingdom where we were given spiritual life (Eph 2:5), freedom from the power of sin (Rom 6:22), freedom from fear (Rom 8:15), freedom from condemnation (Rom 8:1), raised to walk in a new life (Rom 6:4), given divine power to live a godly life (2 Per 1:3, 4), given the resurrection power of Christ (Eph 1:19, 20), the promise of never being separated from the

love of Christ (Rom 8:38, 39), and finally the promise that He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit until the day of our redemption—that day when we meet Him face to face (Eph 1:13 & 2 Cor 1:21, 22).

Knowing and believing these truths releases the power of God’s word to perform its work in us (1 Thess 2:13). This is a hallmark of a true disciple of Christ. Jesus said, “if you continue in my word then you are indeed my disciples (Jn 8:31). He goes on to say in the next verse, “then you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” Walking in the freedom that is ours is essential if we are going to live a victorious life in Christ. As we believe and practice these things the life of Christ will be manifested through us. This also strengthens our inner man (the new man created in Christ Jesus), enabling us to become more like Him.



Apply The Word



Growth and maturity do not happen automatically. We are admonished in the Scripture not to be hearers only, but to be doers of the Word. Hearing without doing will lead us to forget what manner of person we are. We are like the man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like (Ja. 1:22-24). A similar thought is expressed in 2 Peter 1:3-9. The passage reminds believers to be engaged in adding to their faith godly virtues in increasing measure otherwise they will become short-sighted and blind.

The writer of Hebrews describes the condition of those who neglect practicing truth, “by this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics on God again, starting from square one—baby’s milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God’s ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong” (Heb 5:12-14 MSG).

Hearing without doing will lead us to forget what manner of person we are.

God's Word

A plumb line

God's Word is a plumb line. Amos describes the Lord setting a plumb line in the midst of His people, Israel. The plumb line represented His laws, or His Word to the people. It was the standard by which He would judge them (Amos 7:7-8).

God's Word is also a plumb line for making disciples. It is the standard by which we operate in this world. We are to know it (Col 3:16), study it (2 Tim 3:16), and continue in it (Jn 8:31-31).



A life line

It is also the life line for maturing disciples. It equips us (2 Tim 3:17), enlightens us (Psa 119:130), and effectively works in us (1 Thess 2;13). Our life in Christ is maintained by the Word. In his John commentary, Matthew Henry says, "It is in the word that Christ is set before us, and offered to us. It is in the word that we receive and embrace Him; and so where the word of Christ dwells richly there Christ dwells" (*Matthew Henry, A Commentary On The Whole Bible*, Vol. 5, 1124). Paul said that we should let the Word have its home in our hearts and minds and it should dwell within us with all its richness (Col 3:16). When we source from the Word, we are supplied by Christ Himself.



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Knowing who we are in Christ is important to our spiritual growth. Let's reflect on what that means by answering the questions below. Share your answers with your group.

- 1) How is abundant life similar to life in Caanan?

- 2) Describe the old life apart from Christ.

- 3) What does it mean to have a new life in Christ?

4) Describe the importance of the Word in your new life in Christ.

5) How is the Word a plumb line and a life line?

Walk It Out

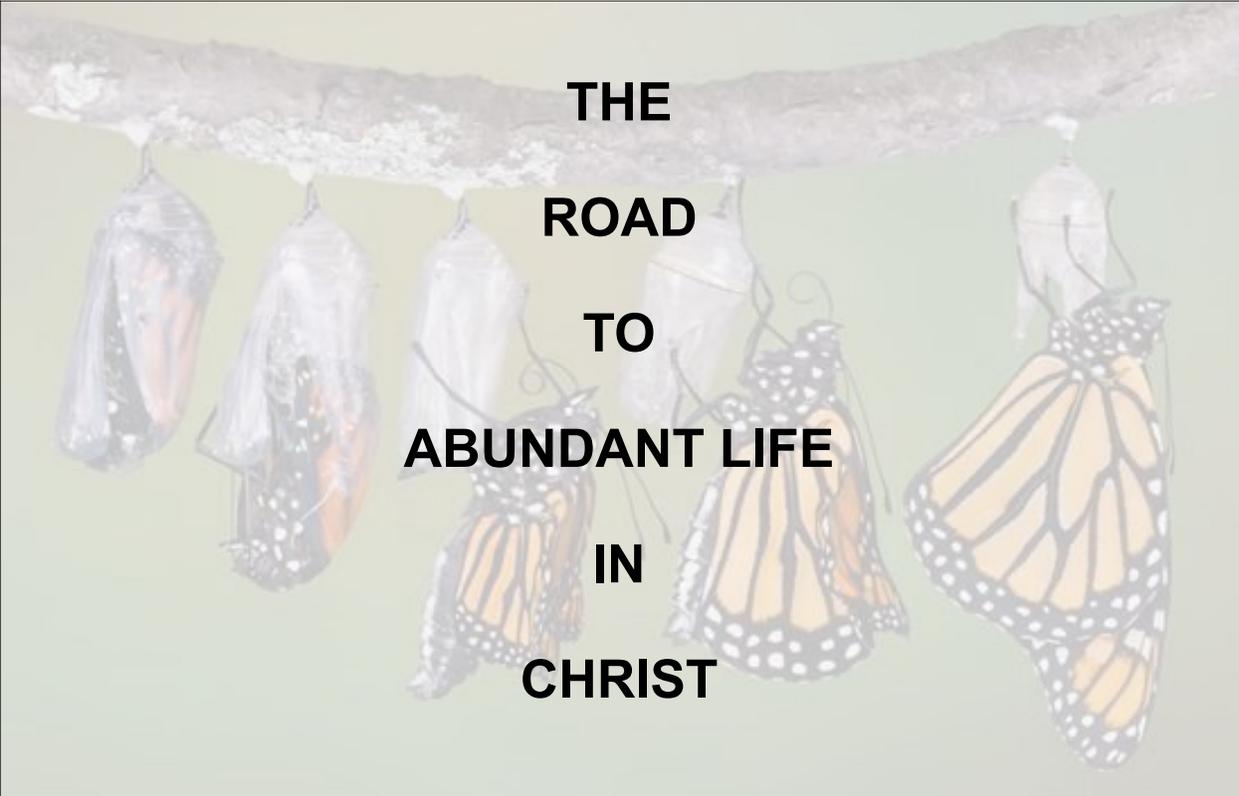
How will you apply the truths of God's word to your life?

List actions you will take to help you mature in your faith. Then pray over them and trust God to implement them in your life.

TRUTH REVEALED	ACTION TO BE TAKEN

A Prayer

Thank you Lord for your incredible love for me. Guide me by the Holy Spirit to walk in your ways. Thank you for your word which is a plumb line and a life line and is profitable for instructing, correcting, reproofing, and training me in righteousness. I praise you that you are conforming me to the image of Christ. AMEN.



**THE
ROAD
TO
ABUNDANT LIFE
IN
CHRIST**

THE ROAD TO ABUNDANT LIFE

Give Me Liberty Not Death

The raising of Lazarus from the dead, chronicled in the book of John, is a picture of what happens, in a spiritual sense, when someone receives Christ as their savior.

Traveling with His disciples near the Jordan where John had been baptizing in the early days, Jesus received the news that Lazarus was very sick. Rather than leave directly and go to Bethany where Lazarus lived with his sisters, Mary and Martha, Jesus waited two more days before going to the sick man's house. When Jesus finally arrived, Lazarus had been dead for several days.

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go" (Jn 11:17, 34, 39-44 NIV).



The Truth That Makes Us Free

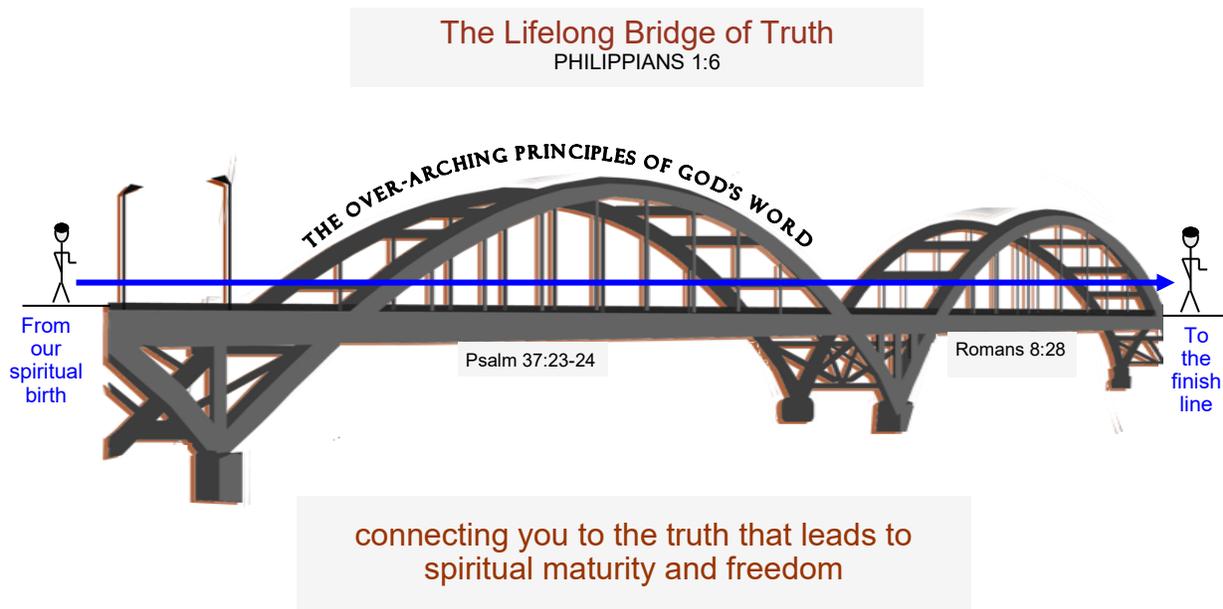
Here is an illustration of what happens to people, though dead in sin, when they respond to the call of God. Hearing and receiving His invitation to salvation, the Holy Spirit enters into them, and they are suddenly given new life; they are created anew. In a way, they are like Lazarus; they are alive, but they are still bound by grave clothes. In other words, they are not yet free to walk in the **newness of life** given to them by Christ. But just as Lazarus needed someone else to remove the grave clothes that bound him from head to toe, believers in Christ also need to have their "grave clothes" removed. This is where the Word of God is most effective. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31, 32 NIV).

The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed

away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). This is true as it relates to our position in Christ but it is not yet true in a practical sense. We are alive but we do not yet have the knowledge of God’s Word that will make us truly free; We are “bound,” in a sense, because we are not yet aware of our freedom. These truths are learned as we study and obey the Word of God. We are like newborn babies that need to grow up in our salvation (1 Pet 2:2). In doing so, we are like Lazarus who became freer as his grave clothes were removed.

A Bridge Over Troubled Waters

The bridge below is a metaphor representing our journey to freedom. It illustrates the value of hearing and obeying the Word which enables us to walk in freedom and experience an overcoming, victorious life. The Scripture references given at the base of the bridge are representative of many that make up our life-long journey.



The “bridge” that leads to maturity and freedom is built on the foundation of our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is held up by the over-arching principles of the Word of God. Its roadway is created as we put into practice what we have learned. As we walk in obedience to the leading of the Spirit of God, He guides us every step of the way. As long as we “continue in what [we] have learned and have become convinced of” (2 Tim 3:14 NIV), we ensure that the roadway of the bridge before us is secure. Thus, enabling us to rise above the snares and pitfalls that Satan puts in our way preventing us from maturing in our faith and being conformed to the image of Christ. The farther down the bridge we travel, the stronger we become in our faith and trust in Christ. Although we begin with little or no knowledge of who we are or what we shall become, it is God who has begun this good work [of salvation] in us

and He will bring it to completion at His coming (Phil 1:6). It is then that we will be truly free.

A Transformed Life

Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). He goes on to say, “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (Phil 3:8).

This was Paul's holy ambition. Once he came in contact with Christ on the Damascus road he was passionate about knowing Him for the remainder of his life. He said, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil 3:12). Paul understood that in order for Christ to shine through his life, his will must totally surrender to Christ's will.

We are to live like Christ, who gave Himself up to God.

Each of us should earnestly desire this level of maturity. “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1). Do you see it? We are to live like Christ, who gave Himself up to God. Paul said it succinctly in Romans 12:1, 2, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This is the essence of a transformed life—dead to self but alive to Christ.

A Renewed Mind

Paul reminds us in Colossians 3:1-2 that we are to set our hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things. This is the point: We should not be thinking about how to accumulate things in this world but how to invest in the kingdom of God which is eternal. In order to accomplish that effectively, our minds need constant renewing by the Word of God.



Continuing to think the way the world thinks will lead to behavior tantamount to its ideology. A warning is given to believers in Ephesians 4:17-19, “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for

more.” The problem is in their thinking. That is why renewing of our minds by the Word of God is so important.



Paul reminds his readers again in Ephesians 4:20-22 that they have been taught not to live that way. “You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds [renewed in your thinking]; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

The Process Of Renewal

The Bible says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). The word “transformed” means to undergo a metamorphosis. Like a butterfly that starts out as a worm in a cocoon and then is transformed into a beautiful winged creature we, too, must undergo a transformation in our thinking. How is that accomplished?



Several things factor into this process. First, we must understand that the Word of God is alive and relevant to us. Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” The word “penetrate” implies that the Word is able to go deep into our being. Notice that it is able to divide soul and spirit. That is, it helps us to discern what is of the world (having to do with the soul) and what is spiritual.

Not only does the Word penetrate our minds, but it also enlightens us. And since it is “living,” which is brought about by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, it is relevant to all of life’s situations. Psalm 119:130 states, “The entrance of your words gives light [enlightenment]; it gives understanding to the simple.” Or, paraphrasing, “The Word penetrates our mind enabling the unskilled or untrained person to understand what God is saying.”

Second, our willingness to accept the Word for what it is allows it to work in us. Take note of these words from 1 Thessalonians 2:13: “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” This is a compelling statement: If we believe the Word, it will perform its work in us. Think of the impact that can have on your life. For example, constant use of the Word trains you to distinguish

good from evil (Heb 5:14), while equipping you to make wise choices that will ensure your spiritual progress. And since it is our primary source of spiritual food, we benefit greatly as we read it, study it, meditate on it, and obey it.

1 Timothy 4:16, charges us to “watch [our] life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Doctrine is synonymous with teaching. This is profitable instruction that comes from the Word of God. Paul said, “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16). This is how we walk in holiness. It is also how we stand with confidence and learn to walk effectively with God. “[We] do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Dt. 8:3).

Renewing your mind requires perseverance.

As you study the Word of God, you will come to know the truth. When it is applied to your life, righteousness triumphs. The Spirit of God strengthens the renewing process. In time, a grid system of the Word will form in your mind, filtering your thoughts, enabling you to discern the truth.

Renewing your mind requires perseverance, as well as, application. Paul told Timothy, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of” (2 Tim 3:14), and again in Philippians 4:9 he said, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.” God’s Word is a fountain that never runs dry. Responding to its truth will deepen your understanding of the greatness of God and His amazing love for you.

The Battlefield Of The Mind

We all face conflicts throughout our lives. Responding to them effectively is vital to our spiritual well-being. We desire to do what Christ says we should do, but the appeal to return to the way we used to think and act is ever present. This is a conflict that all believers must deal with. It is the battlefield of the mind. This is where we contend for the faith. Satan wants to stop our progress as we seek to follow God. But we must learn quickly that this is a spiritual battle and that a Biblical response to this conflict is critical.

Two Kingdoms

There are two kingdoms at work around us; the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. The two are diametrically opposed to each other. Although they cannot be seen, they are very real. Satan is called the god of this world [system] (2 Cor 4:4). He holds captive all who have not received forgiveness of sin through a relationship with Jesus Christ. They are under his dominion and power. They cannot escape without the saving power of God.

Through the power of the gospel, God has rescued us from the domain of darkness [Satan's kingdom] and transferred us into the kingdom of Christ. (Col 1:13). Although we now are free from the power of sin, we are not free from its presence, nor are we free from the influence of Satan.

We must learn to depend on God.

The Bible says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:10-12). We must learn to depend on God, lean on Him, and trust in His mighty power to help us. God has a battle plan for us, and He has given us weapons to fight with. He says in His Word, these weapons "have divine power to demolish strongholds [of the mind], [they] demolish arguments [of the mind] and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, [taking] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:4, 5).

Our chief weapon is the Word of God; it is also called the Sword of the Spirit. When the enemy attacks our mind with ungodly thoughts, we counter with the Word. Knowing the Word and how to handle it correctly is important when we confront the forces of darkness. We are admonished to "present [ourselves] to God, as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

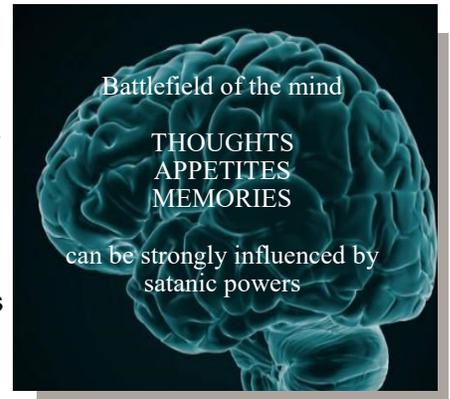
Overcoming The Struggle Within

Although we are a new creation in Christ we are still tied to the flesh—our physical body. Our flesh rebels against the direction that the Spirit is leading us. It is in opposition to our new nature. The Spirit of God, however, directs our thoughts, which leads us to do the things that please God. Following His direction, we learn, through perseverance, how to conquer the flesh.

This conflict is described in Romans 7:22. "For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." The problem is that sin is living in us—in our flesh. It is causing a conflict in our thinking. On the one hand, we want to follow God, but our flesh has other desires. How can we overcome this problem? The Word of God is the most important tool we have to combat the flesh.

We still have the same mind (brain) that we had before we came to Christ, even though the Spirit of God resides in us. Old memories, sensual appetites, and ungodly thoughts can be used by Satan to dominate our thinking, thus stirring up the flesh and enticing us to return to our former ways. The Spirit of God counters these fleshly tendencies by bringing the Word of God to bear against them. But we must know the Word in order for Him to enable us to overcome these temptations.

We are encouraged to “let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly as [we] teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3:16). The word “dwell” means that the Word is at home in us. We know how to handle it correctly (2 Tim 2:13). In other words, we are discerning in how we use the Word in a given situation. For example, if you allow anger to rise up in you because you have been hurt by someone, Satan will use that anger to stir up feelings of resentment and unforgiveness that, if left unchecked, can lead to bitterness and malice. Choosing to apply the Word of God, on the other hand, will not allow the enemy to gain a stronghold in your life. By agreeing with God that anger does not work the righteousness of God in you (Ja 1:20), and that you are to “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Col 3:12-14), you are releasing the Word to perform its work in you (1 Thess 2:13).



The Word of God is the most important tool we have to combat the flesh.



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

The abundant life is for all believers. Take time to answer the questions below. Share your answers with your group.

What is the truth that makes us free?

What is the value of hearing and obeying the Word?

Explain the meaning of Galatians 2:20.

How do you renew your mind?

What does the word "transformed" mean that Paul spoke of in Romans 12:2?

How is a person released from the kingdom of Satan?

How do you overcome the tendencies of the flesh?

Explain the "Lifelong bridge of truth."

Walk It Out

How will you apply the truths of God's word to your life?

List actions you will take to help you mature in your faith. Then pray over them and trust God to implement them in your life.

TRUTH REVEALED	ACTION TO BE TAKEN

A Prayer

***Thank you Lord for the freedom that you give to me as I renew my mind with the Word.
Thank you for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit as He guides me into all truth.
Create in me a desire to know You and the power of Your resurrection. AMEN.***



CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

As we discussed earlier, the battlefield of the mind is where we contend for the faith. This is also where we wrestle with our enemy—the devil. His chief weapons are doubt, fear, and unbelief and he is a master at using them. 1 Peter 1:13 reminds us to “prepare [our] minds for action; be self-controlled.” And again he says, “be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). “Resist him” is the clarion call issued by Peter in the next verse. How? Remain “firm in your faith,” he concludes. Let’s pause and consider the implications of that statement.

Many believers begin to lose the battle at this point. Unless faith is coupled with action to confront the enemy, he will come in like a flood. Unless the decision is made to stand firm, he will advance without opposition. Unless every thought is taken captive to the obedience of Christ, the battle is lost. But when the weapons of our warfare are employed, the enemy is routed.



ADVANCING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Things To Know

1) Know who you are in Christ

You are loved with an everlasting love (Psa 103:17)

You are more than a conqueror (Rom 8:37)

You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil 4:13)

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13)

You are a fellow heir with Christ (Rom 8:17)

The statements above reveal the love, strength, and security that are ours in Christ. They form a threefold cord that is not easily broken (Eccles 4:12). If, however, we doubt the love of Christ toward us, we will hesitate to follow Him. If we doubt the strength of Christ in us, we will fall prey to the attacks of the enemy. And if we doubt our security in Christ, we will lack the courage to remain steadfast in our faith.

2) Know what you have in Christ

You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3)

You have been raised to walk in a new way (quality) of life (Rom 6:4)

You have been freed from the power of sin (Rom 6:7)

You have been given everything to live a godly life (2 Pet 1:3)

Paul said, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things” (Rom 8:31, 32)? This is the heritage of all believers. When Christ saved us, He bequeathed to us

“all things” necessary to live an overcoming, victorious life. We have authority over Satan. We have power over sin. And we have an abundance of blessings in Him.

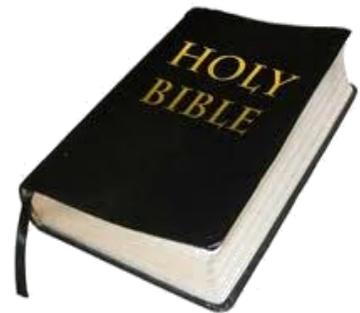
3) Know the Word of Christ

It is practical (Psa 119:130)

It is profitable (2 Tim 3:16)

It is powerful (Heb 4:12)

The Word meets us at our point of need. It speaks to all of life's issues. Whether we need encouragement, hope, or guidance, it provides contemporary relevance. It is divinely inspired to equip us for every good work. It penetrates into the very fabric of our being to bring revelation from God. It works in and through us to affect the world. It reminds us that God is in control of all things and that He is building a kingdom that will last for eternity.



Beginning in Chapter 4 of Ephesians, we are given practical instruction in how to walk effectively with Christ. Take time to meditate and pray over the precepts below. Ask God to reveal areas in your life that may prevent you from being an effective disciple. Then allow Him to make changes in your life to conform you into the image of Christ.

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind (4:23)

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30)

Forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you (4:32)

Be imitators of God (5:1)

Walk in love (5:2)

Walk as children of light (5:8)

Make the most of the time (5:16)

Weapons Of The Kingdom

2 Corinthians 10:4, 5 informs us that kingdom weapons are “divine.” That is, they are from God and they are able to destroy thoughts, opinions, and arguments against the knowledge of God. Paul alludes to the “weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left” (2 Cor 6:7). Here we see the offensive stance of the believer and we see a demonstration of the power of God at work. It is the Word of truth penetrating the heart that separates the clean from the unclean.

Paul does not tell us what the divine weapons are in 2 Corinthians, but he alludes to them in other passages. For example, “Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” is the challenge from Ephesians 6:13. In the verses that follow we are told to put on truth,

righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, and salvation. These are our divine weapons. We destroy thoughts, opinions, and arguments with the truth. But truth is only effective when we speak it in love, it is believed when we walk in righteousness and faith, and it is accepted when it is given as the gospel of peace.

It is against “the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12) that we wrestle, however. This is the root cause of every battle we face. We must keep that in mind and not get drawn into arguments or debate issues by using worldly tactics. We must be alert to the schemes of the enemy and use our weapons effectively to destroy the strongholds of darkness and evil around us. God has placed these divine weapons in our hands to change our homes, communities, nation, and the world. Let us meet the challenge with confidence, stand with boldness and determine to contend for the faith without wavering. As the LORD said to Gideon, “Am I not sending you (Jgs 6:14)?”



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Take time to answer the questions below. Share your answers with your group.

- 1) What does it mean to contend for the faith?

- 2) How do you resist the devil?

- 3) Why is it important to know who you are in Christ?

- 4) What has God given you to overcome the enemy?

- 5) How is the Word of God relevant to your life?

Walk it Out

How will you apply the truths of God’s word to your life? List actions you will take to help you mature in your faith. Then pray over them and trust God to implement them in your life.

TRUTH REVEALED	ACTION TO BE TAKEN

A prayer

Thank you Father for all the things you give to me so that I am able to be transformed to the image of Christ. Teach me to be strong in you. Teach me to understand who I am in Christ. Help me to know the Word—the truth that sets me free. AMEN.

AVOIDING STRONGHOLDS

Don't give place to the devil

“For man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (Ja 1:20). Our understanding of this is vitally important. Likewise, Paul states, “do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Eph 4:26). Failure to rid ourselves of anger will open the opportunity for the devil gain a stronghold in our lives (Eph 4:27). The Greek word used in the text for opportunity is “topos.” *Thayer’s* defines it as; opportunity, power, occasion for acting (*Thayer’s GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON of the New Testament*, 628). The KJV Bible translates Ephesians 4:27, “Neither give place to the devil.”

Anger can lead to feelings of resentment. If left unchecked, bitterness, slander, and malice may follow (Eph 4:31). Anger can also foster unforgiveness. Failing to forgive others is a capital crime with our Lord. This is how Satan divides the body of Christ and maligns the testimony of believers to the world.

Why Forgiveness Is Necessary

Forgiveness obviates God’s discipline. In his Matthew commentary, John MacArthur states: “Where there is an unforgiving spirit, there is sin; and where there is sin, there will be chastening” (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7*, 394).

King David lamented, “Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.” (Psa. 38:3-8).

God forgives us even as we forgive others. This is especially vital to the body of Christ, the congregation. Unforgiveness can have debilitating consequences in the effectiveness of a local group of believers if it is not dealt with quickly and decisively. Colossians 3:12-13 advises: “As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Moreover, he says that if we refuse to forgive others, He will not forgive us. A sobering statement, indeed! It should exhort us to forbid unforgiveness taking root and remaining in our lives.

The Power To Overcome

A healthy and vibrant relationship with Christ is essential in walking in the power of forgiveness. Developing this vital union with Him enables us to avoid the pitfalls of the enemy and his schemes against us. Although we have been delivered from the power of sin, created anew, and have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are still susceptible to falling into sin. The Word of God cautions: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). It also states in the next verse (1:9): “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

The power to overcome sin is in Christ, extended to us when we confess our sins. Each time we stumble, we are reminded of our frailty and our need for total dependence on Him. Out of our weakness we begin to understand the incredible power of God at work in us.

The Power Of Grace

God’s power is effected through our weakness. The apostle Paul tells of “a thorn in the flesh” the Lord gave to him (2Cor 12:7). The reason, he says, was to prevent him from becoming conceited in light of the tremendous revelation he had been given by Christ. He pleaded with the Lord on three occasions and asked that it should leave him. He did not get the answer he wanted—i.e., the removal of the thorn—but he did receive a remarkable gift from God—the gift of grace. You may be thinking, “What’s so special about grace?” What makes it special is what God said about it. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9).

Grace is the power and ability to do God’s will.

Strength For Weakness

Grace is the power and ability to do God’s will. If Paul is willing to walk in the weakness of his flesh, God’s resurrection power will work through him. He says, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12: 9, 10). This is God’s way: Our weakness, His strength. This is what brings glory to Him and Him alone.

Grace To Forgive

Forgiving someone when they have wronged us doesn’t mean that we condone their actions. What is at stake concerns our willingness to surrender our will to the will of Christ. This allows Him to handle the situation according to His plan and purpose for our life. By doing so, we experience the amazing grace that He provides for each of us. “For it is God who works in you

to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil 2:13).

“I Can Forgive But I Can’t Forget.” This is a familiar phrase used by many people when they are confronted with their need to forgive another person. It seems to make them feel better if they can couch it in these terms, especially if they are struggling with forgiving someone whom, they believe, has unjustly wronged them.

It is true that we cannot easily forget events in our lives, particularly if they have exercised a negative impact on us. However, it is *how* we remember what happened that is important. If we see things from God’s perspective, our memories can register positive rather than negative consequences.

Delivered For Good

In his letter to believers in Rome, Paul said that we are debtors, not to the flesh, rather to Christ and to the Spirit (8:12) Why? Because God has delivered us from the bondage of sin and death and transferred us to His kingdom. We have an obligation, therefore, to walk in His ways, submitting ourselves to His guidance.

Paul goes on to say that “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (8: 28). This underscores that no matter how difficult we may find it to do the right thing, He promises that He will work all things (which includes forgiving one another), for our good. They may not be good, feel good, or look good at the time, but the promise remains: *they will work for our good*. Observe one caveat: “all things work for good *to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.*” Loving Him means that we are walking in obedience to His plan and purpose for our life.

The Right Perspective

Forgiving another person affirms our love for them. It also frees us to warm them with the love and compassion of Christ. Moreover, it enables us to pray for them, and it opens doors for Christ to work in their lives. Our message becomes believable when others see in us the reflection of Christ. The manifestation of love and forgiveness is tangible proof of that reflection.

Forgiving another person affirms our love for them.

Forgiveness Is A Two Way Street

The emphasis up to this point has been focused on forgiving others. But what about forgiving ourselves? It is just as important to receive forgiveness as it is to extend it to others.

Let’s examine forgiveness in light of our relationship with Christ. We know, for example, that we *do* sin and stand in need of daily forgiveness from Him. Thankfully the Word of God promises cleansing for our sins once we confess them. (1 John 1:9). Once confession has

been made, we must claim and appropriate His forgiveness by faith and move on.

Beware Of The Snare

One strategy of the enemy is to make us feel that we are not worthy to receive forgiveness, that what we have done is unforgivable. If we continue to think this way, a sense of guilt will begin to take root in us and prevent us from receiving the cleansing that Christ offers to us. The truth is that no sin is outside the width of God's grace that He cannot forgive (Heb 8:12).

**No sin is outside the width of God's
grace that He cannot forgive.**

Satan, the father of lies, wants nothing more than to keep us in the dark preventing us from knowing the truth. God's Word proves to be the most effective weapon we have when dealing with his lies. Handled correctly, it will keep us from being ensnared in his web. Surely the truth will set us free (Jn 8:32).

When we learn to forgive others and to forgive ourselves, we enter into the joy and peace that God gave us when he saved us. Nothing pleases Him more than to see His children walking in the ways of His Son, Jesus Christ. After all, we were made to be conformed into His likeness (Rom 8:29).



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Take time to answer the questions below. Share your answers with your group.

- 1) How can anger cause a stronghold in your life?

- 2) What are the consequences of unforgiveness?

- 3) What is the message of Colossians 3:12-13?

4) How does God's grace effect your life?

5) Why is it important to forgive yourself?

Walk It Out

How will you apply the truths of God's word to your life?

List actions you will take to help you mature in your faith. Then pray over them and trust God to implement them in your life.

TRUTH REVEALED	ACTION TO BE TAKEN

A prayer

Father, thank you for your marvelous and amazing grace. Help me to appropriate your grace in all areas of my life and to depend on you to guide me into the truth of your Word. Thank you that when I come to you with a repentant heart, there is no sin that you cannot forgive. AMEN.

LIVING A BALANCED LIFE

War Of The Wills

One thing that prevents us from becoming useful vessels in God’s hand is not making up our minds to yield ourselves completely to Him. We dislike giving someone else total control of our lives. It goes against our natural way of thinking. Presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, however, is the way that leads to true freedom (Rom 12:1). It is in our weakness—our decision not to exert our self will—that we find Christ’s power at work in us. “For my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

Yielding to God is a daily exercise. Keep in mind that the enemy does not want you to give God the right to direct your life. However, making a conscious decision to surrender your will to the will of God releases the power of His grace to operate in your life. Affirming, “Not my will but your will be done in my life,” breaks the power of the enemy to control your mind and sets you free to walk in victory.

The Fruit Of Righteousness

Paul said, “[I] have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light” (Col 1:9-12).



The essence of Paul’s prayer is that the Colossians would understand God’s will and conduct themselves in a way that allows the fruit of the Spirit to be manifested in the work they do. He also uses the term “worthy” when describing their walk. The meaning of this word can mean *to balance the scales*. In other words, what Paul is communicating to them is that what they say and what they do should manifest equal weight; they should communicate to the world around them that their life is a demonstration of the love of God, in both word and deed.

He reminds us in Phil 4:9 that “whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.” Here the rubber meets the road. While it is important to read, study, meditate on the Word, and pray, it is equally important to do something with what we have learned. Ja 1:22 puts it this way: “Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” He goes on to warn us that if we do not practice what we know, there is a real danger that we will forget what we have heard and the Word will be of no value to us.

There is a similar thought expressed in 2 Pet 1:3-9. Peter reminds us that God has given us everything we need to live a godly life. It begins with our relationship with Him. He goes on to say that through God's Word we are able to participate in His divine nature. That is, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are able to grow and develop the character of God in us. To our faith, we are to add the additional virtues of goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. This is our contribution to the work that brings an abundant harvest through our relationship with Christ. A neglect of these virtues will result in spiritual loss even causing us to forget that we have been cleansed from our former sins. In other words, spiritual blindness sets in and we become ineffective and unproductive in our walk with Him.

The Right Example

Paul told Timothy, "for physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. . . set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim 4:8, 12). He goes on to say, "be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (15, 16).

This is the point: We should be living examples of what we believe. People around us should be able to see God at work in our lives causing them to be drawn to Him. This will happen, according to Paul, as we give ourselves wholly to this task and do it with diligence, demonstrating His love in word and deed.





Arise and Go

So now faith, hope, and love abide,
these three; but the greatest
of these is love.
(1 Cor 13:13)

We live in a world desperate for love. The breakdown of the family coupled with the decline of moral values have left an indelible mark on our society. Motivated by selfish ambition and greed, people clamor to hold the treasures of this world, oblivious to God and to the needs of others around them. Tragically many in the church of Jesus Christ hasten into this vortex of self gratification.

As a result, Satan has cunningly deceived the people of God: They spiral into the lusts and pleasures of the world. They prefer temporal bliss in lieu of eternal treasure. They fail to be the light in darkness. Left on the sidelines are the masses, the hopeless, the Christless, who most need to know the love of God through a relationship with Christ. They cry out for truth. They are desperate to be loved and they are perishing because no one cares to love them with His love.

Shall we continue to ignore the call of our Savior to go and make disciples of all nations? Shall we turn away and not share His love with others? Shall we not consider the words of Jesus, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” and we, too, endure hardship and persecutions for His name’s sake and for the sake of the gospel?

We stand at a crossroads: Let us choose the way of the cross and go forth with confidence and boldness. As the earth trembles under the weight of sin, we must shine the light of the glorious gospel of Christ onto a Christless world.
