

SPIRITUAL WARFARE BLOGS V

Blogs about Spiritual Warfare and the Names of God and Jesus, prayer Principles for Spiritual Warfare, Samson, Spiritual Growth, SW in Church History & Steps to Deliverance

BLOG 512-608



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BLOG 512: GOD'S PROMISES AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Satan is a liar. He always was and always will be. "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He lied to Eve in Eden when he tempted her to disobey God and told her "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). In contrast, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) and His truth brings freedom (John 8:32) not bondage.

God gave us His Word so we could learn and follow the truth and not be misled. The Bible not only teaches us His truth, it reassures us of His promised involvement in our lives. There are hundreds of promises in the Bible. Victor Storms counted 7,487 promises from God to man in the Bible. These promises are like checks from God to be used as needed. They are only good on this earth though - no need for them in heaven. Some Christians know God's promises and rely on them at the necessary times. They live in peace and victory. Other Christians don't know the great resources available to them and live full of anxiety and defeat. Which are you?

These promises are especially important for spiritual warfare, where we face an enemy that is wiser, stronger and more experienced than we are. We need to know and use God's battles to win our battles against our enemies, just like Joshua needed them to have victory as the Jews moved into the Promised Land. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). Joshua followed God's promises and they led him to victory in their physical wars. The same is true for us in our spiritual battles.

This starts a series of blogs about promises we can use for spiritual warfare. Knowing and using the promises of God is very important, especially when fighting Satan and his demons. If not fear, confusion, deception and feelings of helplessness which overwhelm us and we'll be taken captive to live in bondage. God can and will set us free as we use His Word as our offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). That's how Jesus had victory when tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

There is no one weapon that fits all circumstances, we must know which to use when. You use a fly-swatter to kill a fly, not a shotgun. But a flyswatter wouldn't stop a grizzly bear. In spiritual warfare we need to know all the promises at our disposal so we know which one to use when. This series of blogs will help you understand the promises, the checks from God, the weapons we have available to us so we know how and when to use them. The better we know them the more efficiently we can use them and the sooner we will have victory. So read these blogs, memorize them so you always have them with you and use them in your daily life. (February 22, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Quoting Scripture is our "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:10-18) and that is how Jesus had victory over Satan's temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). This is a great verse to counter fear and remind us of where the real power lies! Memorize Joshua 1:9 this week. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). When will you need this weapon? Use it to fight fear, discouragement and weakness.

(My blogs about my India ministry are currently in a series on the promises of God as they relate to daily Christian life. If you would like to be on this mailing list contact me at jerry@schmoyer.net.)

BLOG 513: GOD PROMISES COMPASSION & GRACE

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Psalms 103:8

We are looking at promises from God to use in our spiritual warfare. Knowing and using them make all the difference between defeat and victory. God's promises in this verse are to assure us of gracious, loving treatment. All His dealings with us will be done with compassion, grace, lack of anger and abounding in love. What wonderful promises!

Satan tries to defeat us in our minds and thoughts by telling us lies about God, like he did to Eve (Genesis 3:4). He told her that God wasn't good, that He was withholding good from her (Genesis 3:5). When she believed that lie, she was open to disobeying God. And the rest, as they say, is history. Let's look at these promises about God's character and treatment of us in more detail.

1. COMPASSIONATE

Satan's lie is that God is impatient, that He has run out of patience with us because of our failures and sin. Therefore, He doesn't care about us - no one does! Have you ever heard that lie? How did you respond? I hope with the truth that verses like this promise. God always understands, even when no one else does. Jesus understands because He is God and knows all things, but also because He went through everything we go through and knows by experience (Hebrews 4:15-16). He hurts when we hurt.

We may expect too much of ourselves but He never does for He knows we are weak and prone to failure (Psalm 103:14). Satan has no compassion; he is totally self-absorbed in himself. He is pride personified. God is the opposite. He is other centered. His focus is on us, not Himself. Or else why would He have left perfect heaven to come to a sin-infested world to die a painful death on a cross for those who mock and reject Him? God is compassionate. Don't ever think differently. That's a promise you can count on.

2. GRACIOUS

How can God be so compassionate to me when I don't deserve it? That is grace, and that's the second characteristic of God we are promised we can count on. Satan lies and tells us that we don't deserve God's compassion and mercy - and it's true that we don't. But deserving it has nothing to do with it because it is freely given by grace. God's grace depends on the giver, not the recipient. When God promises to show grace, He shows it, no matter what we have or haven't done. We don't earn it or deserve it. It is free. That's why it is called "grace."

Satan's lies tell us we have failed too many times, sinned too badly and that it's too late for us. That is true of him, but not of us! God never runs out of grace for it is part of His very nature. It's not a supply He draws from, it is His very essence to be gracious. And the less we deserve it the more His grace is seen. If we didn't need it, it wouldn't be grace. The more undeserving we are the more His grace is seen, and He is glorified in that.

He never runs out of grace of mercy, they are "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). Satan, in contrast, has no grace or mercy on anyone. He has never shown anyone compassion, not even his own demons. When the final judgment comes, he will be shown no mercy, either (Revelation 20:1-10).

We'll finish this verse in the next blog. In the next week memorize Psalm 103:8. Have it handy in your mind and heart. You'll refer to it often!

(My blogs about my India ministry are currently in a series on the promises of God as they relate to daily Christian life. If you would like to be on this mailing list contact me at jerry@schmoyer.net.)

BLOG 514: GOD PROMISES PATIENCE AND LOVE

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Psalms 103:8

In the last blog we started looking at the 4 character traits God promises to show us in His dealings with us. We saw He promised to always be compassionate and gracious to us. Now we'll look at His promises to be patient and loving.

3. SLOW TO ANGER

If you grew up in a household where anger was expressed inappropriately you may still live in fear of anger. It may be programmed into you that the authority figure in your life is angry, or can get angry at any time. Satan builds on this to whisper his lies that God is angry at you. That's why you struggle and have problems in life. He may even go so far as to say you never had salvation or, if you did, God in His anger took it back. But God promises He is slow to anger.

As His children, we know we will never face His anger. Romans 8:1 promises that. He will and does show anger at sin, at those who harm others. His righteous indignation is real. Jesus expressed it twice when He chased the money changers out of the temple (John 2:13-16; Matthew 21:17-23). Even then, though, He is slow to show anger. He is patient, giving much time for unbelievers to turn to Him.

Satan rules through fear. Many of the world's largest religions are based on fear. A parent may use fear to control a child, but that does not produce a secure, mature adult. God, our perfect Father, never uses fear to manipulate or punish us. If you think otherwise, you are believing a lie of Satan's.

4. ABOUNDING IN LOVE

Not only does God not get angry at us, but He overflows with love for us. That may be hard to believe and accept, it has been for me. It seems too good to be true. It's not something we often experience in human relationships so to imagine it in our relationship with God can be difficult. Satan's lies tell us we are guilty and full of shame. He tells us we are unlovable - no one has loved us and no one can really love us. He tells us we are rejected and no one could love us if they really knew us. If we don't love ourselves it can be very difficult to believe someone else can love us, especially our perfect, all-knowing God.

God assures His love for us is unconditional 'agape' love. Since there are no conditions for us to meet there can be no way we can break them and disqualify for His love. Besides, He did the most for us before we were even born. Before we could do anything to deserve His love, He left heaven and came to earth to go to the cross for our eternal sin-debt. If He loved us that much when we didn't know Him, how could He love us less now when we do desire to love and follow Him, even though we fail at it?

Satan doesn't know what love is. He operates in the realm of hate and revenge. He tries to feed that same hate into us if we let him (John 8:44). When we believe his lies, we block God from working in us through His Holy Spirit (don't grieve, Ephesians 4:30: don't quench, 1 Thessalonians 5:19). The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) are gone so we don't have His supernatural love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in us.

David committed adultery and murder, and Paul murdered Christian, but God had compassion on them both. He loved them and was gracious to them. He loves us and is gracious to us as well. Don't let Satan tell you anything different!

Memorize Psalm 103:8. Have it handy in your mind and heart. You'll refer to it often!

BLOG 515: GOD PROMISES HIS NEARNESS

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4:6-8

Wouldn't it be great if God promised a sure-fire way to have victory over Satan and demons? Well, He does! We have been talking about Bible promises we need to use in our spiritual warfare. James 4:6-8 contains wonderful promises that Satan will flee from us and God will come near us. However, there are some conditions to be met for this to happen.

Condition 1: **be humble, not proud.** Satan's fall was because of his pride and he uses pride as a tool to control many people today. Ask God to show you if there is any pride in you. Ask a trusted mate or friend to tell you when they see you acting prideful. When they are honest with you, don't react with defensiveness, explanations or justification. Humbly learn from them. You don't want to be proud, do you? No one does. It's an easy sin to see in others but very hard to see in ourselves. Yet if we want Satan to flee and to be close to God, we cannot be proud.

Condition 2: **submit yourself to God.** Trust Him with your life and future. Yield to His will. Obey His Word. Model your life after Jesus. Submission is first of all an attitude and then an action. To have victory over Satan you must first willingly submit 100% to God's leadership and lordship in your life.

Condition 3: **resist the devil.** This is a continual attitude of refusing his thoughts and turning from his temptations. 'Resist' is an active word and speaks of courage and forcefulness. It is something we must do nonstop, not just once in a while. We need to have a warrior attitude, seeing sin as an enemy to defeat whenever it comes near us.

Condition 4: **come near to God.** This starts in our mind and heart when we commit to follow His truth. It is then seen in our actions of prayer, worship, Bible study and faithful living. We keep our minds set on God alone (Romans 12:1-2) and that will then be seen in our actions.

Condition 5: **wash your hand and purify your hearts.** This means we cannot have sin in our life. Our actions and thoughts must all be holy and pleasing to God. What we do must be done to serve Him and not for selfish reasons. When we sin, we must admit it and ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:9). We can't dabble with sin, even just hang around near it, or Satan won't flee and we won't be near God.

OK, now comes the good part – the promises when we do commit to God and live for Him.

Promise 1: **Satan will flee.** Satan lies and says he won't ever leave us, we'll never be free of him, following God won't work, God doesn't want us, etc. He tries to instill fear and discouragement in us, because they open the door for his demons to gain a foothold and work in our lives. But God promises that Satan WILL flee. Who are you going to believe?

Sometimes our victory is instant, but other times it is gradual. When Joshua conquered the Promised Land, it was little by little, battle by battle. It was gradual. Win this land, settle and populate it, then move ahead to take back more land. Our victories are often like that: gain some ground over Satan, grow and become strong in those areas, then move into another area to gain more ground back as well. Be patient. A good warrior must patiently persevere. Satan is good at that. We must be better.

Promise 2: **God will come near.** When Satan's demons lose ground, God claims and fills that place. God promises that when we turn to Him and strive to live for Him that he WILL come near to us. He doesn't sit back and wait for us to get it all right and live a perfect life. As soon as we make

the first step to Him, He rushes to our side to be with us and help us. It doesn't matter if we "feel" like He is with us or not. He says He is and He never lies, so He is. Trust His promise, not your feelings.

Promise 3: **God gives us more than enough grace.** When we take the first step He is there helping and assisting. It's all by His grace, not by anything we do to earn or deserve it. It's grace alone.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He met these conditions (Matthew 4:1-11). As a result, Satan fled and God was with Him. It worked for others. It'll work for you as well. Try it and see.

This is a longer promise to memorize but well worth it. Which of these conditions are most difficult for you to meet? Which part of the promise do you need most right now?

BLOG 516: GOD PROMISES FREEDOM

***Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* John 8:32**

Everyone wants freedom. It's built into us to be unrestricted and unhindered. We don't want anything or anyone forcefully controlling us. Yet very few people are truly free. Many are in physical bondage; even more are in emotional or spiritual captivity. Everyone seeks freedom, for their body and especially for their soul. Yet there is only one way to liberty and that is through Jesus. He not only makes it available; He promises it to those who know Him and His teaching. His truth is what sets us free.

Satan's lie is that there is no truth, or, if there is, no one can know it. He tells people there are no absolutes, you can make your own truth and it'll be truth to you. But Jesus promises there is truth, and that we can know it and apply it. What wonderful provisions He make available for us.

Stephen knew the truth and taught it in his synagogue (Acts 7). Paul listened to him but rejected the truth and took part in his stoning to silence his words. But what Stephen had taught stayed with Paul and after he became a Christian, he taught the same truth. It had set Stephen free and then it also set Paul free. Ezra also taught God's truth to the people (Ezra 7:10) and they accepted it and found freedom in obeying God's Word. The same happened when King Josiah found the law of God which had been lost and neglected. He had it read and applied and God greatly blessed the people (2 King 22).

Truth is important because it brings freedom. Satan's lies say we will never be free from the sin or difficulty we face because it is too strong for us. We hear, "Others may be free, but never you," or "God won't free you." But God promises that freedom is available, and it comes through knowing and applying His truth. We know Satan is a defeated foe (1 John 4:4) and when we commit to living for Jesus and resisting Satan there will ultimately be victory (James 4:6-8). We know Jesus has given us power and authority over demons (Luke 9:1-2; 10:17-20). Knowing God's truth about spiritual warfare and applying it to our lives will enable us to win our battles and gain freedom.

Freedom doesn't mean an absence of battles or challenges. Freedom starts within, in our own minds and hearts. First, we must find freedom from fear and anger, lust and jealousy, pride and greed. Freedom doesn't have to do mainly with our circumstances without, but our bondage within. Truth starts within and that's where freedom first begins as well. God never promised to remove our trials and hurts, but He did promise to give us peace within (freedom from fear and stress). We can be free from fear, guilt, shame, anger and all the rest by knowing and following Jesus. It's available to every believer.

The Ethiopian Eunuch read God's Words of truth and listened as Philip explained them to him (Acts 8). He accepted their truth and found freedom from his guilt and emptiness. The people Jesus healed found freedom from physical bondage, but the greater freedom came to those who saw the truth of who He was and were freed from their sin. His truth made them free as well.

I grew up in liberal Christianity. I was intrigued by the occult and explored various cults but nothing satisfied until I came to Jesus and found His truth for all my needs. I'm still learning and growing, but I do know that truth is only found in Him, and that His truth does indeed set us free. Have you found that as well?

Memorize John 8:32. When might you need to apply this truth to your life? When can you use it to help someone who isn't a believer?

BLOG 517: GOD PROMISES HE IS GREATER THAN SATAN

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 1 John 4:4

Have you ever looked for a Bible verse that clearly and specifically say God is greater than Satan and his demons? There is – 1 John 4:4. This is a favorite verse of mine and I return to this promise often. It's a tool that has many uses and applications, one you need to be very familiar with. It's most effective when used in our warfare.

The promise is clear: Satan can't and won't win because God is greater than Satan. He cast Satan out of heaven in the beginning, and He'll send Satan to hell for all eternity (Revelation 20:1-10). Satan can't win. He is a defeated foe! Therefore we don't have to fear him. Fear is one of his strongest and most effective weapons, but when we believe this promise we need never fear Satan or demons. We are not helpless against him. Satan cannot do anything he wants; only what God allows. We see that clearly in the case of Job (Job 1-2).

We don't have to fear Satan's power. Nor do we have to be deceived by his deceptions. Since God is greater, we can have victory, no matter what lies Satan tells us. Satan is all bluff and bragging but can't back up his claims. Jesus gave power and authority to His disciples to cast out demons (Luke 9:1-2; 10:17-20). Paul had victory over Satan's demons (Acts 16:16-40). We have that same victory over Satan (Romans 16:20).

This promise should bring us encouragement and confidence. We need to share this truth with others who are struggling. We should quote this verse so demons are reminded of it as well. It's a great promise to claim and use. Demons are never too great, Satan is never too strong, there is always victory in Jesus!

Memorizing this verse is a must. Knowing it is basic equipment for spiritual warfare. This promise alone will get you a long way toward winning your battles!

BLOG 518: GOD PROMISES WE ARE A NEW CREATION

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17

The world God was created was perfect and so were the people in it. Adam and Eve were faultless until they sinned. Then they fell, and all of us are born with that sinful nature. But God didn't leave us in that fallen state. He paid the price for all those sins so He could recreate us, make us a new creation in His sight. 2 Corinthians 5:17 explains how this happens.

There are 3 amazing promises in this verse for anyone who is “in Christ.” That refers to all who believe in Him, who have received His free gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). He promises 1) we are a new creation, 2) that the old has gone, and 3) that the new has come. These all are parts of one promise, but it is stated in three ways so we will completely understand all that is given us.

First, we are told **we are a new creation**. In the verse before this promise, 2 Corinthians 5:14-16, Paul said we died with Christ and no longer live for ourselves. Our old sin nature is no longer the stronger, controlling force in our lives. At salvation His new nature is put into us, the “new creation” He makes us. It is stronger than our old sinful nature, so we no longer need to be captive to sin. We can still sin, but we no longer have to sin for His power is us I greater than the power of sin. In Genesis man is physically created, the old creation. But now in Jesus we have newness of life (Roman 6:4). We aren’t under sins control any longer (Romans 6:12-23). We still sin (1 John 1:8-10) but we aren’t under the control of sin’s power. That’s a great promise!

Second, Paul explains this by saying “**the old has gone**.” We don’t have to live as we did before salvation, when we were dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-9). We can use this verse to claim our new birth in Jesus (John 3) and break any claim demons make to us through generational or ancestral openings. All that is gone.

Third, because the old I gone, “**the new has come**.” There are many changes that take place at the moment of salvation, many special benefits and blessings that become ours as children of God. When we put our faith in Jesus and are born into His family, He shower us with many special blessings and privileges that we don’t have before salvation. He promises that all our sin and shame are gone (Colossians 1:14) and we are His children (John 1:12) both by new birth (John 3) and adoption (Ephesian 1:5). God call us His friend (John 15:15) and unconditionally loves us (roman 8:35-39). We can talk to Him any time (Ephesian 2:18; 3:12) and receive guidance and wisdom whenever needed (1 Corinthians 2:16). He promises to provide for all our need (Philippian 4:19). Another benefit of being a new creation is the victory we can have over sin (Romans 6:2; Galatians 2:20) and over Satan and his demon (Colossians 1:13; Luke 10:18-20). This is because God lives within us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 3:16). We are secure in Him and can never lose our salvation (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Romans 8:31-39). When we die, we know we will be with Him forever in heaven (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20). All this and much more is what we are promised as being His children.

The Bible is full of examples of those who have become His new creation at salvation. Rahab, the ex-prostitute from Jericho, is one. Mary Magdalene, who was possessed by seven demons (Luke 8:1-3), is another example of a changed life. Many other names could be added to the list, including mine and yours!

This verse is easy to memorize. It’s good to quote whenever you are faced with difficulties, temptations or when you feel God isn’t as close as you’d like Him to be.

BLOG 519: GOD PROMISES WE CAN RESIST SATAN - 1

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8-9

Lions. The Bible refers to them several times. Usually, their majesty and power are in focus when we think of Jesus as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). But sometimes their deadly violence and their stealth cunning are in view. That's when they are used as a picture of Satan. Peter refers to him as "a roaring lion looking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8-9). He should know. He was devoured by Satan a time or two himself. But then haven't we all...

When we are told to "resist," we know that some pressure is being applied against us. This command presumes there is a force working to overthrow us that must be resisted. If we don't resist it will overwhelm us and knock us down. It will sweep us away. That is exactly what Satan wants to do. The command to "resist" alerts to the fact that a power coming against us can overpower us unless we put all our energy and resources into opposing it.

You might wonder what the promise is in this verse. Actually, there are two. First, it is clearly implied that **we can resist Satan**. We don't have to give in to his temptations, or to his demons' attacks on us or our loved ones. We aren't at their mercy, even though they are much more cunning and powerful than us. They are accountable to God, who has sovereign control over all they can do (Job 1-2). Don't believe their lies that we'll never be free, that we can't defeat them or that they'll oppress us forever. Jesus resisted Satan (Matthew 4:1-11) and with His help so can we.

The second promise, unstated but obviously implied, is that **when we resist, he will have to back off**. We see this in James 4:6-8. Both James (first book written in the New Testament) and Peter (one of the last written) agree. This is not just theology to them; it is practical experience speaking. By writing this they testify to the truth of their statements. I can testify to it as well, and so can you.

Joseph resisted when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. David resisted killing Saul when he had an opportunity. Daniel resisted the opportunity to compromise to avoid the lion's den. Jesus resisted Satan's temptations in the wilderness. Unfortunately, there are many examples of those who didn't resist and sinned: Eve in Eden, Peter when asked if he knew Jesus, Samson with Delilah, David with Bathsheba and Jonah when he ran from God.

However, as in most promises, there are conditions to be met as well. If God gave these promises without conditions, we'd not live in obedience to Him, we'd just come to Him when we needed help and then keep living as we did after He did what we wanted. Wait a minute - don't we do that sometimes anyway? God is not a magic gene we come to for help. He's not here to serve us. We are here to serve Him. His purpose is to make us like Jesus, not to hang around so He is available whenever we get into a situation we can't handle on our own. So of course, promises have conditions. God can only help those who are committed to Him, open to Him and trusting in Him. As a pastor, people sometimes came to me when they needed help in a tough situation. I was only able to really help them when they trusted what I said and took my advice. That's how it is with God as well.

We'll look at these conditions in detail in the next blog. Now just focus on the promises. Satan can be resisted and, when he is, he will have to back off. It worked for others; it'll work for you as well.

Start memorizing 1 Peter 5:8-9. You'll have two weeks to complete it. What temptations do you most often give in to? Where are you weakest in following Jesus? When in these situations, quote this promise over and over.

BLOG 520: GOD PROMISES WE CAN RESIST SATAN - 2

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8-9

In the last blog we started looking at the promises in this verse. We saw that it assumes that 1) we can resist Satan and 2) when we resist, he will have to back off. Great promises! But there are

conditions to be met for this to happen. We can't just live any way we want then expect God to always show up and win our battles for us. There prerequisites we need to have.

The first quality required of us to have victory over Satan's lion-like attacks is to be **self-controlled**. Impulsive emotionalism opens us to disobedience and sin. God's Word tells us to let our mind explain reality to our emotions. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). We need His Presence to keep from sin and to obey His Word. We need His power so we can act and not react. We need His control so we overcome temptation. We need self-control to live a godly, Christ-honoring life.

Similar to this, but mentioned separately, is that we are to be **alert**. Satan is sneaky, deceptive and deceitful (John 8:44). He deceived Eve in Eden. Many today don't even believe in Satan and demons, and that includes many born-again Christians. If they do believe he exists, they write him off as of no consequence. He is glad for this, for those who downplay him, or deny his existence, are not alert to his tricks and traps. That makes it very easy for the lion to get close enough to capture and destroy them.

Too many Christians have an entitlement mentality today when it comes to their faith. They focus on what they expect, even demand God do for them. Foremost in their minds is what they get out of it, what they feel God owes them. Satan uses this lack of alertness to sneak in and capture them. God says we are in a battle (Ephesians 6) and we need a warrior mentality. If you were walking around a jungle in Africa somewhere, or in an inner-city slum, you'd be alert to any danger around you. We need to have that same mentality as we progress through the 21st century world we live in. We need to be keenly aware of deception or temptation from what we watch on TV, what we listen to at work and who we let influence us. It's a jungle here as well – so be alert!

We need a firm foundation from which to stand against Satan's lion-like attacks. Peter says that footing is our faith, "**standing firm in the faith**." "The faith" refers to the body of truth we have in God's Word. It is the doctrine, the theology, the content of our faith. We need to know God's Word and promises, we need to apply them to our lives and we need to stand strong in them when attacked. It's only when we know God's truth and apply it to our lives that we can "resist." We can't do it in our own strength, only in Gods. That's where knowing and using His promises comes in.

We may think this is too hard, too much, and we can't resist, we can't stand. We may get the idea that we are the only one who has such great problems and so many terrible attacks. But Peter makes it clear that **our brothers and sisters throughout the world are going through the same thing**. Our battles aren't unique to us. We don't face anything worse than others face (1 Corinthians 10:13). We are not alone. We are all in God's army. We are all soldiers of the king standing against His enemies. We need His armor to defend ourselves and to push on to victory (Ephesians 6:10-20). We need to have a front-line mentality. We are in a death struggle, a battle to the finish.

Being light in a dark world is serious business. Living like Jesus draws the attention and the attacks of the enemy. But God is faithful. He will be with us. He stood by Daniel when he was thrown to physical lions in his day (Daniel 6) and he'll be with us as we face our lions today. We can resist and we can have victory. God says so. God promises it!

Finish memorizing 1 Peter 5:8-9. Pray daily for self-control and alertness so you can be aware of Satan's attempts to trap you. Ask God to help you stand firm in your faith.

BLOG 521: GOD PROMISES US POWER AND AUTHORITY

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Luke 9:1-2

When we travel to India each year to train pastors we arrive at a large, modern airport. It looks like it could be located in any major US city except for one thing - soldiers with automatic weapons are walking around everywhere. The orders they gave were quickly obeyed. Most were very young men. If they hadn't been in uniform with their rifles no one would have paid them any attention. The uniform and weapon showed that they were representing the authority and power of the Indian government and therefore were to be obeyed. Like those young men, we don't have any authority or power in ourselves, but when we represent Jesus and have His authority and power, then the forces of evil must obey.

The promises here are that Jesus gives power and authority to His followers to have victory over Satan and demons. Let's look at each of these separately.

Authority, 'exousia' in the Greek, is used 108 times in the New Testament and refers to the right to use power. He gave the disciples the authority to enforce His spiritual commands and laws. Policemen have authority, a badge, which allows them to enforce the laws of the government. It's not their own authority but that which comes from their government. It is delegated authority, like a husband has to a wife and a parent to a child. Everything Jesus did was because God had given Him authority to do it (John 5:19). He had laid aside His own divine authority (Philippians 2:6-8) to live life as any other human being. All He did was by God's own authority given to Him, as it is to us as well.

Jesus has given us that same authority to use today (John 14:12; Matthew 28:18-20). Satan deceives us into thinking we are powerless victims but that is a lie. As God's children we have access to the same resources Jesus did when He lived on earth. God has given us His full blessing because we are His children. We are born into His family; He is our Father (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6) and we are His children (John 1:12; I John 3:-2). He put His Holy Spirit inside us (John 14:17). He gives us an equal inheritance with His Son, Jesus (Romans 8:14-17).

Not only did Jesus give His disciples authority, He also gave them **power**. A policeman needs authority, a badge, but sometimes he needs power to enforce that authority – a club or gun. 'Power' is used 118 times in the New Testament and refers to power, might, strength and force. Our word 'dynamite' comes from it. God has also given us His power as well as His authority (Acts 1:8; Luke 10:17).

We also have this power available to us (Acts 1:8; John 14:12). It is His power that transforms us into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) as He makes us a new man (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). His power delivers us from temptations and trials when we rely on Him (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 2:14). He has power to put His divine nature in us (2 Peter 1:4), give us abundant life now & eternal life in heaven (John 3:16; 10:10).

Jesus gave His followers power and authority to drive out ALL demons (Luke 9:1) – none are greater than His power. He did not enable His followers to cure all diseases, though. He said we could drive out ALL demons but didn't say we could cure ALL diseases. When it comes to sickness, our Heavenly Father, who responds to His children's petitions, is The One who has the final say (regarding healing), but when it comes to casting out demons, we have Jesus' assurance that ALL demons MUST obey and yield! When Jesus returns all disease will be gone, but we don't have authority to remove all of it now.

Sceva was a Jewish exorcist who tried using Jesus' name as a ritual chant to remove a demon from a man. He was doing it in his own strength for he wasn't a believer in Jesus. The demon knew this and knew he didn't have to obey Sceva so he attacked and severely injured Sceva and his 7 sons (Acts 19:14-20). The power and authority is not in us, nor in using Jesus' name as a lucky charm. It is only found in Jesus who works through us when we are closely connected to Him.

Always remember the power and authority you have in Jesus. You can pray and preach in His name and power. Use it to encourage people when they need it, give counsel with the wisdom of God's Spirit, rebuke demons in Jesus' name, ask God to heal if it is His will, claim protection for your family and yourself, teach His Word with authority, witness to others with power, forgive those who hurt you and show unconditional love to all. We don't have to live in defeat nor do we ever have to fear Satan or his forces. We have everything we need for victory in Jesus, but we must use the power and authority He gives us because on our own we can do nothing (John 15:5).

This short verse is important to memorize and use. When do you need Jesus' authority in spiritual warfare in your own life? When do you need His power to have victory in your spiritual battles? When those times come, ask Him for them and trust Him to work through you.

BLOG 522: GOD PROMISES PROTECTION

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:17-20

In the previous blog we saw Jesus giving His disciples the assignment to spread His message. He gave them power and authority to prove they were representing Him. Power over demons and disease showed God's power. If the physical body, which can be seen, can be healed and restored, then so can the spiritual soul which cannot be seen. Sure enough, Jesus kept His promise and worked through the disciples, as we see in Luke 10:17-20.

The first promise is for **power and authority**, as seen in Luke 9:1-2. "I HAVE given you" Jesus says indicating it happened in the past, it is already done. It's not something for them to wait for in the future. The Greek tense indicates the action is completed and the results continue on. Jesus had given to them, and therefore to us as well, two things: "power" and "authority."

Jesus says they can "**trample on snakes and scorpions**," pictures of Satan and demons in the Bible. Jesus' power over demons was from God, but those who didn't want to recognize this needed to find a different way to explain His power because clearly it was super human. The only other power source in the universe besides God is Satan, and so they were forced to say that what Jesus did was by demonic powers (John 7:20; 8:48-52; 10:20-25). They said Jesus was an imposter, a deceiver (Matthew 27:63; John 7:12, 47). When Herod heard about Jesus' miracles, he thought it was some kind of supernatural 'magic', somehow John came back to life (Matthew 6:14-16).

The second promise here is that "**nothing will harm you**." That is important to remember because fear is one of Satan's greatest tools against us. Demons are bullies that act like they have more power than they really do. Of course, we alone are no match for them, but with God's power and authority working through us we don't have to fear them. They have to submit (Romans 16:23).

The disciples said, "even the demons submit to us **in your name**." Now, in the present, we have authority and power over him in Jesus' name (John 14:12; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 9:1; 10:1, 17-19; Acts 1:8). It's not our name or authority, but only through Him that we can have this victory.

There is no excuse, no reason for us to fear or give in to demons. We don't have to be defeated by them – following Jesus brings victory. It may be slow and gradual in coming, but it does come.

Another important lesson from this is that **Jesus sent the disciples out to minister** (Luke 10:1). The way we learn is by doing, not by waiting, by letting someone else do it, or by trying to learn everything there is to know. We will never know it all, never feel competent, never be on top of everything – we must keep depending on God which is how He wants it (2 Corinthians 12:9). All you need to know to begin your own spiritual warfare is that Jesus is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4). That is enough to start. God will be with you; honor your attempts and help you learn. God knows when we start this work, we will not be experts but will learn as we go. Read worthwhile books, talk with others who do this in a Biblical way and do whatever it takes to learn more about spiritual warfare. Fight wisely, or the demons will not leave, or if they do they will come back even stronger (Matthew 12:44-45; Luke 11:25-26). Do your best with God's strength and keep growing in wisdom and skill.

Not only did Jesus send them out, but He **sent them out by twos**. As much as possible have someone with you to pray for you, to help you and encourage you, for extra wisdom, and so you can train them (or learn from them) so that they can then go on their own and train someone else. Especially when getting started, try to have someone else with you when you confront the demon's realm.

Jesus concludes this passage with a warning: **“Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”** Some can become distracted by their spiritual warfare abilities, even feeling pride at the power Jesus gives us. Jesus warns against that, reminding us that our salvation is what we are to focus on, not our spiritual warfare successes.

This is a longer verse to memorize but well worth it. If you struggle with fear it is a great reminder of Jesus' victory over Satan and demons, and then ours through Him. It is well worth memorizing.

BLOG 523: GOD PROMISES SUFFICIENT GRACE

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 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 Corinthians 12:9-10

God's promises only seem to be important when we really need them. When things are going fine, we don't think of them, but when we are 'in over our heads' and need a lifeline, we reach out for something true – something solid to hang on to. And that's precisely when God's promises mean the most! That's certainly true of me. I have been going to India for many years. Ministering to pastors there is a great blessing and a wonderful privilege! It's an amazing opportunity and I thank God for it! I also thank Him for His presence and promises, for without them I wouldn't be able to minister there. indent? This promise, **“when I am weak, then I am strong,”** has been especially precious to me while in India. While there, I have faced, (unlike anything I have ever experienced elsewhere), physical, emotional and spiritual weaknesses. These weaknesses have been so profound that they have threatened, on several occasions, my role in this very important ministry! Having this promise to hang on to as a mindset, **“when I am weak, then I am strong,”** has in fact, been half of the resulting victory that I have been able to enjoy in facing these challenges! The less strength of my own that I had to carry on, the more I had to depend upon God's. I always found His strength sufficient for whatever I needed. There were times when I became very weak, but He never did! The weaker I was, the more I had to depend on God to give me the wisdom and strength I needed. I recognize I was helpless on my own but knew that He would provide what I need when I need it. He worked in me

and in the circumstances around me to protect, strengthen and deliver me. He will do the same for you.

You see, we are always weak; it's just that we don't always realize it. For some foolish reason we think we have strength and resources comparable to what we face in life. That's why God lets us sometimes see our weakness, so we can better give credit where it is due - to His strength getting us through life. What could you face without Him? Where would you be if His Spirit and presence left you entirely on your own? What if you had to live life just on your own resources? What would your life look like now? What kind of shape would you be in? This promise isn't just for when things get really really bad. It's for every single day of our lives!

There is another promise in this verse. This one is just as important as the one we first looked at. It is that **His grace is sufficient**. Apostle Paul was writing from personal experience. He had a thorn in his flesh- something he describes as an angel?/messenger of Satan (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). It was a demon. The demon was causing him tremendous pain and great difficulty in his ministry, so he prayed 3 times to have the demon removed. But God, in His sovereignty, didn't remove the demon. If anyone would have their prayers answered, you would think it would be Paul, but not so! He wasn't delivered from the demonic oppression. God does not always deliver us, either.

Whenever God doesn't deliver us from demonic oppression, He always helps us to endure what comes against us. That's what He did with Paul. Paul realized that God's grace was sufficient to enable him not only to handle the pain and oppression, but also to keep on persevering with life and ministry anyway?. God doesn't always remove what we face, even when it is demonic. That's an important lesson to remember in spiritual warfare. God never promised to always remove every demonic work in that is against us. But He does, however, promise to give us grace to sustain us if He doesn't remove it.

I counsel with many demonized Christians who insist that God deliver them right away. If it doesn't happen immediately, they go from church to church, or from deliverance counselor to deliverance counselor. They insist that God wants them delivered, instead of considering that God may have a reason for allowing the demonizing to remain. Many become focused entirely on their problem. Eventually some may even turn from God because He doesn't seem to be handling their situation the way they expect it to be handled. God will always take care of our needs. However, He just doesn't always do it the way in which we demand. If you have been struggling with a situation for some time, especially a demonic one, and it isn't going away, press in to God even more; for His sufficient grace will see you through. God is ever Faithful.

God's grace was sufficient for Paul. It was also sufficient to sustain Joseph through years of prison. The grace of God carried Daniel throughout the time he spent in Babylon; it strengthened Job through his extreme suffering. God's unmerited love and favor enabled countless believers to have faced martyrdom. I assure you; it'll be sufficient for you as well.

Why would God ever allow a demon to have access to Paul of all people? God allowed it to keep Paul humble. With his great talent and gifts and his very successful ministry, Paul could have gotten proud. From what I've deduced, Paul was a very confident, self-assured person anyway. He had to be in order to carry out the ministry God gave him. But he also needed to remain humble and dependent upon God. This "thorn in the flesh" did just that. It pointed out his weakness, and drove him even closer to cling to God where he could experience God's sufficient grace.

BLOG 524: GOD PROMISES SECURITY

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. Matthew 12:20

Though he stumbles, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand. Psalms 37:24

How awful it must be for a child to not feel secure in the love and acceptance of a family. I can't imagine what it would be like to live in fear of no longer being a part of that family and always having to wonder if I would be rejected for something I did (or didn't do). Yet that is how many of God's children live their lives. Satan and his forces feed them lies that they aren't good enough for God, they have lost their salvation, God won't forgive them this time or it's too late for them to repent. Nothing could be further from the truth. The verses above assure Christians that God will never turn from us or turn us away from Him. This is illustrated in three ways in these verses.

1. A bruised reed He will not break. Reeds grow in still water and are hollow, so it is easy to cut a few flute-like holes in one and make music by blowing through it. They were very delicate and easily break. When that happened, they would be discarded as useless and another made in its place. God promises He will not do that to us, no matter our sin or failure. Even when we aren't making music for Him, when our lives have turned in rebellion, He still hold onto us. This is great assurance that no matter what happens He won't reject us.

2. A smoldering wick He will not snuff out. To produce light, oil was poured in a shallow bowl and twisted threads were partly submerged in the oil. The other end of the material was lit and, as oil was drawn into the wick, it burned producing a feeble light. It wasn't much but was better than darkness. Sometimes the wick wouldn't burn efficiently and there would be no flame, just smoke. When this happened, they would simply throw away the faulty wick and use another. Wicks, like reeds, were inexpensive and plentiful. Again, God says He won't throw away a wick that is smoking and not producing light. It's bad enough when our lives don't reflect the light of Jesus, but even when we stink and pollute the space around us, He still keeps us and won't remove us. Like the prodigal son, even when we are in rebellion and sin, we are still His son (Luke 15:11-32).

3. We may stumble but not fall, for the Lord upholds us. The picture here is of two people walking when one trips and starts to fall but the other grabs hold of them and keeps them from going down. That's what God does for us when we stumble. We may suffer earthly consequences of our sin, but God doesn't let us fall from His love or grace. He just won't let us go (Romans 8:31-39). Often, we have a hard time forgiving ourselves when we trip over a sin, but God never does. He knows how weak and sin-prone we are (Psalm 103:14).

Jesus says we are safe in His hand, and around His hand is wrapped God's hand, making us doubly safe and secure (John 10:28-29). John told Nicodemus we must be born again (John 3:3) and, to carry out the analogy, once a person is born, they can't be unborn. There is no judgment for us (Romans 8:1) so how can we ever be rejected? Noah, Rahab and Lot are good examples of believers being safe from judgment even when everyone else around them falls. Nothing can come between us and God, not Satan and not even ourselves (Romans 8:31-39).

We can still sin after salvation (1 John 1:8-10) but we don't lose our salvation. Lot is an example of this (2 Peter 2:7), as is David (Romans 4:6-8) and Peter (John 21:17). Satan can't take our salvation, but he can take our joy if we let him. We can ruin our testimony by sin, but not lose our salvation. Satan can try to put fear of rejection in us, get our eyes on ourself instead of Jesus, tell us God is harsh and unloving or that our sin will turn Him from us, but those are all lies. Even when we are broken, smoking and stumbling, He is with us and never leaves us. Never.

There are many good verses about our security of salvation in this article. If you struggle with this lie, write out several of them and start memorizing them. It's the only way to speak truth to your mind and give you peace.

BLOG 525: GOD PROMISES HIS WORD IS POWERFUL

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. Hebrews 4:12

When I was 10, I heeded the plan of salvation and turned my life over to God. Immediately I had a strong desire to know and to follow His Word. A love for the Bible has been with me my whole life. It's not just a book, it's the living, life-changing Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 explains how this is so. The passage lists 3 descriptions and 2 impacts of God's Word.

First the descriptions:

Description 1. **The Word of God is living.** The Bible isn't an ordinary book with words that just sit on the sheets of paper. It contains life and shows the way to eternal life; the Bible, of itself, is alive (John 6:63). It has to be in order to produce life. The Bible, as a collective book, is the word of life. Jesus Himself is identified as the Living Word in John 1:1-14. His life reveals God's Word in action. Jesus and the Bible both reveal God's truth: His living Word.

Description 2. **The Word of God is active.** Through the Holy Spirit, The Word of God is also moving and working. The Word changes the hearts of those who read it and even brings them to life-which is in the Spirit! It convicts, encourages, teaches, comforts, guides and much more. The Word impacts the lives of unbelievers as well. That's why so many of its opponents do all they can to silence it by rejecting its historical authenticity. The Word of God accomplishes God's purposes. (Palm 19:7-11; 107:20; 147:15, 18; Isaiah 40:8; 55:11; Galatians 3:8; Ephesians 5:26; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23)

Description 3. **The Word of God is sharper than any double-edged sword.** It is precise and effective, like a razor-sharp scalpel in the hands of a skillful surgeon. It cuts right to the heart of the matter in the mind and conscience. It convicts of sin, exposes wrong motives and removes anything ungodly or sinful. Paul uses the same word picture for the Bible, calling it the Sword of the Spirit in Ephesians 6:17.

Having said what the Word of God is, we now see what it does and its impact.

Impact 1. **It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.** Because it is very sharp and is controlled by the dexterous hand of God Himself, The Word of God penetrates beyond our defenses, hardness, excuses and any walls we put up to block God out. It penetrates our deepest, most innermost being, the totality and depth of our existence. God will take those words and drive them home where they need to go. The Word could be used to convict someone of their need of Jesus, or to bring a sinning believer back to God. Use His Word. Think it. Pray it. Quote it. Be immersed in it (Psalm 119:9,11). Memorizing God's Word is so important as this impresses on the mind God's Will and Heart. This, as a result, guarantees sure availability and enables accessibility for the Spirit to bring to the forefront of the believer's mind Scripture to use at the most appropriate times. When involved in spiritual warfare, use this Sword by quoting Scripture. It may also be used as an artillery of truth against demons so they will fall back and flee in the name of Jesus.

Effect 2. **It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.** God alone can rightly weigh the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. We can fool everyone else, even ourselves, but God knows and will use His Word to convict us of His truth. We cannot impress or fool Him. He sees right through hypocrisy and pretense, and His Word slashes through the false into the true self to show us our sin. Unfortunately, this doesn't mean that people will respond with confession and change, (which is Repentance), even when convicted. Many times, in fact, anger flares up, excuses are made, others are blamed. Any number of things are done, in fact, to avoid merely facing the inner conviction His Spirit brings.

In spiritual warfare, quote God's Word to have living power which penetrates. Our words are flat and dead, but God's Word is alive and active and has power over sin, Satan, and demons. It alone gets to the root of the issue as it closes openings and defeats strongholds. It is a great privilege and awesome responsibility we have in being given God's Word to handle and use. Wield your sword with skill and precision. Use it well. It is the difference between victory and defeat.

This is a verse all Christians should know and use. If you haven't already memorized it, do so this week. God's Spirit will bring it to mind when you need it and will help you apply it most effectively.

BLOG 526: GOD PROMISES PRAYER IS EFFECTIVE

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16

When I was a young boy, I remember seeing a plaque on someone's wall saying "Prayer Changes Things." It was so simple yet so profound. We want prayer to change things, but sometimes we wonder if it really does. Do our prayers do anything to influence the sovereign God of the universe? The answer is definitely yes. God says so. He promises they do in James 5:16. There are 2 conditions given before the promises are stated.

Condition 1: **We must pray.** This seems so obvious we hardly need to say it, but it must be stated. How many people today are satisfied with their prayer life? How many of us really tap into the wonderful resource of prayer as we should? James says we don't have because we don't ask (James 4:2-3). We underestimate the power of prayer. Someone said that prayer isn't preliminary to the battle, prayer IS the battle. How true that is! It doesn't matter how many wonderful promises about prayer are in this verse, they don't do us any good if we don't pray. By the way, how is your prayer life these days?

Condition 2: **We must be righteous.** Prayer is for God's children, those born into His family who have received His righteousness by faith in Jesus (Romans 5:1-11). We are righteous in God's sight when we come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. But there is a double meaning in the word here, for the verse also means we must do our best to live a righteous life. When we sin, we must admit (confess) our sins (1 John 1:9). A child cannot live in rebellion and disobedience to their parents and expect their parents to do whatever they want when they demand something. Broken relationships must be restored first. That's true of God and His children as well. "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will" (John 9:31).

All right, now the promises to praying believers not willfully living in sin:

Promise 1: **Prayer is powerful.** Prayer does have the power to change things. Samson prayed and God gave him strength to defeat his Philistine enemies (Judges 16:28). Elijah prayed and a dead boy came back to life (1 Kings 17:17-24). He prayed again and fire came down from heaven burning up his altar, stones and water (1 Kings 18:38). Elijah prayed and the rain stopped. Years later he prayed again and the rains returned (James 5:17-18) Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still and it happened (Joshua 10:12-13). The Bible is full of hundreds of examples. I'm sure you have heard stories from friends about the power of prayer. You should take a minute to make a list of times when God answered your prayers in a powerful way. Unless we write them down, we have a way of forgetting them.

Promise 2: **Prayer is effective.** Prayer isn't a way for us to get God to do what we want. That's not what it means that prayer is effective. It refers to the fact that praying makes a difference. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). Abraham's prayer to have Lot delivered from Sodom before judgment was effective

(Genesis 18:16-33). Nehemiah's prayer to go back to Jerusalem to help the people there was also effective (Nehemiah 1). The list can go on and on. Prayer is effective. God says so!

Prayer and the Word are powerful weapons in spiritual warfare. Make sure there isn't sin in your life and don't neglect your time with God in prayer. Don't just pray for what you want, spend your time thanking and praising Him as well as praying for others. When praying for yourself remember to pray the problem, not what you think is the solution. Prayer does change things.

This is a short but powerful promise to memorize. But don't just learn it, practice it!

BLOG 527: THE DAY IT ALL BEGAN (Adam & Eve 1)

The Bible is the best book on spiritual warfare that there is, so let's see just what it has to say about the subject. We'll start in the very beginning, with **Adam and Eve**. Pause for a minute here and read **Genesis 3:1-7**.

Very shortly after Adam and Eve were created, their free will was tested. Satan twisted God's words and put doubt of God's goodness in Eve (Genesis 3:1). The battle started in their minds, and continues so today (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). He implied God was withholding something good from them, a lie he continues to use with good success even today.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Sin has been described as "meeting a legitimate need in an illegitimate way." When we look for ways to meet our needs for peace, pleasure, comfort, support and satisfaction outside the plan and will of God we sin. Instead of waiting for God to provide for our needs in His way and time, we try to find a way to do that ourselves. Satan's lie that maybe God won't do it, or that God is withholding something good from us, still is successful today. He does the same thing today, putting doubts into our mind about why, if He loves us, God would allow pain, suffering, injustice, poverty, rejection, lack of mate or children, lack of job, etc. When we face trials or painful situations then doubts of God's goodness abound.

But God has proven His goodness by leaving heaven and going to the cross so we can spend eternity with Him. His goodness is no longer in question. We may not understand His plan or His timing, but we must trust that a God so good He would literally die for us certainly has our best interests in mind, whether we understand His workings or not (Matthew 7:10).

Thank God for the free will He gave you to choose to follow Him. Make choices today that would please Him. Choose to obey Him and love Him. You have a free will, and the only thing you can ever give God is your choice to serve Him. It's the best gift we can give. It's the only gift He wants from us!

Adam chose to believe Satan's lie and act on it, and thus sin entered into the human race (Romans 5:12). Humans, too, used their God-given free will choice to opt for sin. Immediately there were consequences: shame (Genesis 3:7) replaces innocence (Genesis 2:25), guilt and separation from God (Genesis 3:8, 22-24), deception and lies (Genesis 3:10), blaming each other (Genesis 3:12) and continuing consequences of sin in daily life (Genesis 3:16-24).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Angels had a one-time free will choice and that decision is now locked for all eternity. They cannot change their choice. As human beings we have a chance to choose God throughout our lives on earth, but then when we die our choices are locked in, too, and cannot change. While alive God allows grace to give mankind another chance. Demons have no such alternative.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: When Satan challenged Eve she responded by getting into a debate. The trap was set (Genesis 3:1-6). Jesus, however, only responded to Satan's temptations

by stating "it is written" (Matthew 4:10). When a demon puts a temptation or thought in your mind, or gives you an opportunity to sin, never discuss your options, think about it, try to talk yourself out of it, etc. Always respond with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

When involved in deliverance with someone who is demonized, never allow the demon to speak out loud through the person. Never get into a debate or argument with them through thoughts they put in the person's mind. Never have any communication with them.

Do you believe God is now withholding something good from you? Have you believed that in the past? What would you say to a friend who felt God was withholding good from them?

BLOG 528: FAKED OUT BY THE DEVIL (Adam & Eve 2)

In the previous blog we started looking at lessons we can learn from Satan's attack on **Adam and Eve** in Eden. He didn't come at them in power and force, but in friendly persuasion. He didn't try to pressure them into anything. He got them to do what he wanted by simply twisting the truth so they believed something untrue. He deceived them. He's been perfecting that special weapon for thousands of years and uses it today to cause more damage than we can imagine. The dangerous thing about deception is that the one being tricked doesn't realize it until after the harm is done. Read **Genesis 3:1-7** and look at the lessons below:

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Having gotten her to dialogue with him and having planted doubts about God's goodness in Eve's mind, Satan then denies the truth of God's Word (Genesis 3:4). Eve misquoted God, saying they couldn't even touch the fruit, when all God said was that they could not eat it (Genesis 3:3). Satan took advantage of her lack of correct understanding of the Word of God. From this we learn that knowing and believing God's Word is totally essential for our victorious living today. We must know it completely and totally (Ephesians 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Also, we must believe it, especially the part about God's holiness and hatred of sin. Mistaking patience and grace for approval of sin is very wrong. God will judge sin. Sin does bring death. Satan is a liar and deceiver (John 8:44). Unless a thought lines up with God's Word it is wrong.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Sin, and demonizing, all start in the mind, in our thoughts. Actions result from mental choices we make. The majority of demonizing consists of demons putting thoughts into a person's mind or snatching thoughts out of a person's mind. While they don't have access to our minds and thoughts to the same extent that God does, the Bible makes it clear that there is some access. Jesus said this in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed: "Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown." (Mark 4:15). David's thought to take a census was demonic (I Chronicles 21:1ff; II Samuel 24:1ff). So was Ananias & Sapphira's greed (Acts 5:3) and Saul's jealousy/anger (I Samuel 16:14-23). That's why, when talking about spiritual warfare, Paul says we are to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Not only can Satan's forces put wrong thoughts into our minds, they can snatch right thoughts out of our minds (Mark 4:15) so that we forget them.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Eve was deceived by Satan because she acted according to her feelings and emotions, putting them over the truth of what God had clearly said (Titus 2:13-15; 2 Corinthians 11:3). Feelings and emotions are fine, important and necessary. They are icing on the cake of life, adding color and enjoyment, and indeed God created them for this purpose, but He didn't create them to be the source of our decision-making. Our feelings should depend on our rational thought. When our feelings get ahead of it or away from it then trouble comes. You know in your mind that you are an OK person, yet fear you will be a failure and rejected. When feelings aren't founded on truth they go wrong. The truth is that you are who you are because God created you that

way (Psalm 139), but your emotions reject that truth and try to do the ‘thinking’ themselves. We must let our mind explain reality to our emotions. When we place feelings over fact, we are wrong.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: How can God’s people, who have His truth in the Bible, be so deceived by Satan and his demons? Do you remember the children's story about the emperor's new clothes? Some thieves convinced him they were making fine garments which only the enlightened could see so he pretended to see them. Everyone else did also. Then in a parade, a little boy spoke the truth and everyone realized they had been believing a lie and deceiving themselves. Satan deceives us into believing a lie. But how can we be deceived if we know the truth? We always have a free will choice and are never forced to believe a lie.

1. We can be demonized. Like a drunk is influenced by alcohol, so can we be influenced by demons.
2. We can prefer to be deceived because we don’t want to face the truth or don’t like the truth, so we convince ourselves that a lie is true. We start to really believe it because we want to.
3. We let ourselves be controlled by our emotions instead of our mind. When we let our feelings explain reality (for example, reacting out of fear), we replace the truth with deception.
4. Our mind can be deceived, too, when we use it as the final determining factor and think absolute truth comes from within us. Without the anchor of God’s Word to form our mind and correct our errors we can truly believe something based on the facts as we interpret them. But we may not be interpreting them correctly. Only God has all the facts and perfect insight, seeing the future as clearly as the past, so when we reject His truth, we are open to any kind of deception.
5. Satan and demons try to get us to believe their deceptions. Of course, they don’t ‘sell’ their product as a black lie, but make it look as appealing and good as possible. We sometimes fall for the bait because the black appeals to us. They show the immediate benefits, not long-term consequences of the sin.
6. Even aside from the enemy, our own natural tendency is to sin (this is called our “sin nature”). Because of this we prefer sin, for since the fall, we humans are often more interested in what is easiest and most enjoyable, instead of what is best in the long run. Our ‘flesh’ desires instant gratification and we can ‘want’ something so much that we leave all reason and balance behind.

Sin entered with Adam and Eve and therefore spiritual warfare entered the human arena. God was quick to assure us who the ultimate winner would be. While the ultimate Victor is clearly known, the battle that started in Eden continues even though today.

What have you learned about deception that you didn’t know before? Pray and ask God to open your eyes so you can see the truth and not be misled by deception.

BLOG 529: LESSONS FROM JESUS’ TEMPTATION - 1

Immediately following His baptism Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit, the ‘dove’ who had just descended on Him, into the desert (Matthew 4:1). He needed time to focus on what was about to come, to strengthen His spirit and commitment. He needed time alone with His Father, something that would happen time after time during His earthly life. After 40 days of fasting and praying **Jesus was tempted by Satan**. Whether He waited because God restrained him or because he wanted to hit Jesus when He was weakest is unknown. Satan, who had been opposing God’s plan of redemption from the beginning (Genesis 3:14-15), now focuses his attacks on Jesus.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Note that Jesus was in the perfect center of God’s will when He was tempted, for God Himself led Him to the desert (Matthew 4:1). Being tempted to sin does not mean we are out of God’s will or not following closely to Him. Often the opposite is true, like with Jesus. It is

because we are following God closely that we are attacked the hardest. Be aware so you aren't taken by surprise. Don't think it is a bad sign that you are tempted. Being attacked is actually a good sign for Satan only attacks those who are doing damage to his kingdom. When you aren't being attacked is the time to make sure you haven't drifted from the conflict (Luke 6:26).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Note that Satan attacks immediately, as soon as Jesus commits to doing God's will by being baptized. For us, too, the attacks come when we move in the direction of following God. When we are not as close to God, Satan and his forces leave us alone, but when our devotion increases so do the enemy's attacks. We soon discover that when we fade a bit in our walk with the Lord then the pressure decreases, tempting us to follow God, but not quite so closely!

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Notice, too, that this battle with Satan was God's perfect will for Jesus. "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). God does not prevent our battles, no matter how hard we pray for that to happen, but He does help us through them. So it is better to focus on fighting them in His strength than looking for ways to avoid them. They are part of God's will for us because they strength us and show us that His grace is sufficient, as was true of the Jews fighting for the Promised Land behind Joshua's leadership.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: The place where Jesus was sent by God to fast, pray and battle Satan was the "desert," considered the abode of demons (Matthew 12:43). Sometimes God leads us into strongholds of Satan's so we can do battle for Him, knowing we can experience have victory through His power (1 John 4:4). We aren't to run from such encounters but face them with His strength.

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: Fasting can be a useful tool in spiritual warfare, not because our suffering earns God's pity so He is more apt to answer our prayers, but because it is a way of denying our flesh and putting spiritual things before personal needs. It clears our mind and helps us focus on the battle at hand. Hunger reminds us of our weakness, our need of His strength and it reminds us to pray. It frees up more time to spend in prayer as well. We must be sure God wants us to fast before we do so, and we must use wisdom in what kind of a fast it is and how long it lasts, but it is a weapon we should make us of. Jesus used it often.

LESSON FOR TODAY 6: Jesus faced these human temptations as a man just like us. He did not rely on His deity to make it through. He was attacked just as Adam had been, but unlike Adam He did not sin and therefore He won back what Adam lost (Romans 5:12-21). We, too, can have victory through God's power, just as Jesus did. The same resource is available to us!

Being tempted doesn't mean you are out of God's will. Think of a time you were faithfully following Jesus but were tempted anyway? Is there anything anyone can do to assure they won't ever be tempted again?

BLOG 530: LESSONS FROM JESUS' TEMPTATION - 2

The first temptation Jesus faced after fasting for 40 days in the wilderness was for physical needs – Jesus was hungry after 40 days of not eating. Jesus could turn the stones to bread, but that was not God's will. This was a legitimate need but not God's way of meeting it.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Sin is using an illegitimate way to meet a legitimate need. Hunger is a legitimate need, but Jesus must meet it in God's way, not in his own or Satan's way. When tempted look for the legitimate need behind it (peace, comfort, companionship, joy, etc.) and seek to have that need met God's way instead of taking a 'shortcut' that is sinful.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Building on what was just said, the fact that we have a legitimate need doesn't mean it has to be immediately met. The very common "entitlement mentality" today

seems to say we should have everything we want as soon as we want it, and that parents, God, the government, or life itself owes it to us! That is a very unbiblical attitude and quite dangerous. In fact, it's the very lie Satan used with Eve in Eden – "You are entitled to this fruit!"

Jesus had victory over Satan's temptations by quoting God's Word each time He was tempted. That is the only way to have victory. Jesus knew the Bible well enough to quote the book of Deuteronomy three times.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Quoting Scripture is our best weapon against Satan's attacks against us as well. Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Psalm 119:9-11 tell us that it's through God's Word that we have victory. When thoughts or temptations you don't want come into your mind, use Scripture to have victory. There is power in God's Word that is lacking in our own words (Hebrews 4:12). Reminding demons of God's truth shows them they must submit to it, and helps us put our faith in Him and not give in to the lie behind the temptation. It allows our mind to explain reality to our emotions. Always have some verses that speak to your situation memorized or written down where you can reference them at any time. Use them as soon as you sense opposition coming against your thoughts.

What are some of your favorite Bible verses to use when attacked? How many of God's promises can you recite from memory? When is the last time you memorized a Bible verse?

BLOG 531: LESSONS FROM JESUS' TEMPTATION - 3

The **second temptation** Satan used against Jesus after His 40 day fast in the wilderness was an appeal to Jesus' pride. He was due recognition from all so Satan suggested an easy way to get it - by throwing Himself down from the highest part of the temple and letting angels come rescue Him in the sight of the watching crowds. If Satan wanted to defeat Jesus, why would he offer to help Him have everyone come worship Him? While this might have seemed like something that would benefit Jesus, it really was a subtle way to give him recognition without having to go to the cross. This would have been a short-cut to His Kingship – giving Him the throne of Israel without having to go through the agony of crucifixion. But if He had taken this route, then there would be no salvation for us – and that was exactly why Satan tempted Him in this way. He was willing for Jesus to have His temporary throne on earth as long as He didn't pay for our sins in the process.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Pride is what motivated Satan to sin and rebel against God (Isaiah 14:13-14). It is still one of his best tools against us today (1 Timothy 3:6). There is no short-cut to maturity or spirituality, no easy way to grow. The way up is down. God exalts those who humble themselves (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6). He humbles those who exalt themselves (Luke 18:14). Pride is self-centeredness, a focus on ones self. It is pride if we think we are better than others or if we think we are worse than others. Either extreme is pride, an inordinate attention to self. Either extreme is wrong. Satan doesn't care which direction he gets us to fall as long as we fall!

Satan's **third temptation** was a final desperate measure. When Adam sinner he gave temporary rulership of the world to Satan (1 John 5:19; John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 6:12). Jesus came to pay the price for Adam's sin, as well as ours, so that Satan would have no claim to this world system. Satan tempted Jesus to become the ruler of the world without having to go to the cross. Jesus would be serving Satan, though, and wanted nothing to do with that.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Satan seems to offer people today everything they want if they turn to this world system. He received ownership from Adam of the world system of values and motives as it operates today (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He tries to get us to think that we, too, can have everything we want. Adam and Eve believed this lie, and many today believe it as well. But it is a lie. It is Satan's bait to trap people into bondage.

When Satan was unable to defeat Jesus after three tries, he left, and the angels came to minister to Jesus (Matthew 4:11). Satan wasn't done, though. Luke 4:13 says he left but would return at an "opportune time." He is never done; he never stops working against Jesus.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: There will be lulls in demonic oppression against us. Often it seems oppression comes in cycles or waves. Some times things are very difficult, then it seems the attacks get milder or even disappear for awhile. But they always return. We will never have ultimate, total victory in this life. If you are going through a difficult time remember that it will one day lessen. If you are not going through a time of challenges and attacks, be prepared for when it returns. Don't be surprised or discouraged when it returns, either. Use this rest time to refresh and prepare for the battle when it starts again.

In what areas of life are you most often tempted? Why are you tempted in that part of your life so often? What can you do to better assure victory when those temptations come?

BLOG 532: "I MARRIED THE WRONG PERSON" (Marriage Lies 1)

A lie is a false statement with deliberate intent to deceive. It is an inaccurate declaration to mislead. A lie is an imposter of the truth. Lies find their source in Satan because "**there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies**" (John 8:44). Lies are one of Satan's most productive tools. Why attack head on when he can be so much more effective with deception? If we are to have victory over him, we must understand his lies.

Human history starts with a story of Eve believing lies from Satan, the "**father of lies**" (John 8:44). She listened to what he was saying and, because she wasn't well versed in the truth, she believed him (Genesis 3:3). She distorted God's truth by adding to what God said ("nor shall you touch the fruit"). Her ignorance of the truth was the weak link Satan needed to get her to believe his lie. He told her that God was withholding something good from her. The truth is that God never withholds anything good (Psalm 84:11). If He doesn't give us something, He knows it isn't 'good' for us.

Once a lie is believed then it is acted on. Beliefs lead to actions (Proverbs 23:7). And actions have consequences. Eve encouraged Adam to disobey and eat, and the consequence was sin entering the world (Romans 5:12). Satan has been lying to us ever since.

Since marriage and family are foundational relationships for us, it's no surprise that many of Satan's most productive lies concern the husband-wife relationship. He tries to work through one mate to spread a lie to the other, as he used Eve to influence Adam to sin (Genesis 3). We are more susceptible to deception if it comes from a trusted and influential source, like a mate. When one believes a lie, it impacts their mate as well.

One of the most common lies Satan feeds a person when there are difficulties in their marriage is, "**I married the wrong person, life would have been better if I had married someone else.**" It doesn't matter how long you have been married. This lie can pop into your mind at any time. There are a couple of lies behind this lie that make this lie effective.

The first lie behind the lie is, "**There is only right person for me to marry.**" Disney, fairy tales and romantic literature imply that there is one 'soul mate' for you out there. When you find them, you will live happily ever after. They picture it with no sin nature, no self-centeredness, no anger, pride or fear interfering. If you find and marry the one right person for you, marriage will be near to perfect.

The other lie behind this lie is the assumption that, “**We must live happily ever after.**” If we aren’t there must be something wrong with the other person. “It’s all their fault.” “I don’t have to try.” “No matter what I do it will never work out.”

The truth is that marriage doesn’t create problems, it reveals problems already within us. Our sin nature flares up when we get hurt, don’t get our own way, have to yield, things don’t seem fair, we are misunderstood, our needs aren’t met, etc. etc. etc. The truth is that there is no person so perfect we won’t have to struggle and stretching, because we all sin continually (Genesis 6:5). Marriage can bring out the worse in us so we can identify our sin and control it through His power. God created marriage to make us holy, not happy. Even if you didn’t consult God and married someone you shouldn’t have married, once you say “I do” God takes it from there and He will use that mate and that marriage to mature both of you to make you more Christlike and bless each of you through the other (Romans 8:28-29). God allowed you to marry that person and He doesn’t make mistakes (Isaiah 46:10).

If you struggle with this lie, remember the truth is that happiness doesn’t come through finding the right person. Rather it is through your being the right person. The world says keep looking until you find that perfect soul mate where you will live happily ever after. God says be the right person, the person God created you to be, and let Him use your marriage and mate to make you more like Jesus. God never commands us to always like each other, but He does promise to always give us love for each other when we put Him first. And if you aren’t married, if you are **single**, a widow or widower, God will use that state to stretch and mature you into the image of Jesus as well.

When is the last time you wondered if you married the wrong person? What do you do with that lie when it pops into your mind?

What other lies about marriage are you believing? You’ll know they are lies if they don’t line up with what Scripture tell us.

BLOG 533: “WE FELL OUT OF LOVE” (Marriage Lies 2)

What should I say when a couple I married several years earlier tells me they are separating because they “**fell out of love**”? They may say they married too young and have grown apart. I remember one young man who wanted to save his marriage but his wife said that ‘loving feeling’ was gone and she wanted to find it with someone else. I worked with them for months but nothing changed her mind and she left. Is it really possible to “fall out of love”? Or is that just a lie Satan uses to undermine couples and destroy families?

The lie behind the lie here is that love is some powerful forces that overtakes us and carries us along. Love must make us feel good or it isn’t love. Isn’t that what many songs, movies and books tell us? We don’t fall out of love; we stop making the choice to love and to pay the price to keep on loving. When we follow this lie, our mind is in not control, we go by our feelings or emotions. A common phrase today is to “**follow your heart,**” but God says “**The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure**” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Love based on feelings, i.e., **romantic love, is weak.** It has no way of dealing with sin and hurts. If you marry someone with a sin nature, they will let you down and disappoint you. You will find they are self-centered. Romantic love can’t deal with that because it is no elasticity to it. It can’t be stretched, it simply shatters. Romance always fades as a motivating emotion, thus the phrase “the honeymoon is over.” Romance is weak because it is self-centered, it is all about me and how I feel. If it isn’t replaced with something deeper and more solid, then the relationship will fall apart. That kind of emotion can end, but we can and must still feed the love we have for each other, even if the feeling fades.

Another lie behind the “I fell out of love” lie, is that love is what holds a relationship together. Therefore, when the feeling of love is gone, so is the marriage. Marriage is a commitment based on vows given. “As long as we both shall live” is now often replaced by “as long as love shall last.” When the feeling fades, they think it’s time to find it again with another person. Living together instead of marriage makes it easier to move on, and there are no vows to keep or break, so many couples aren’t getting married.

Singles deal with many of the same issues in their relationships with family and friends. “Feelings” come and go in all relationships and aren’t to be depended on. Solid friendships go deeper and don’t depend on emotions.

Feelings are unreliable. How many parents always feel deep love for their children? When things happen that stretch that love, should they say that this parent-child relationship isn’t working so they need to find other children to raise instead? That is ridiculous. The parents are committed to that child for better or for worse. The same as in marriage.

The solution is to remember that **love is a choice**. It is an act of the will, choosing to see good in the other and letting God fill our hearts with love. Much of the world has arranged marriages. We see them all the time in India. Couples unite with entirely different expectations and assumptions in these kinds of marriage. They aren’t looking for a Hollywood romance to sweep them off their feet. When they commit to treating each other in loving, respectful ways, love grows. The truth is, . It means falling in love over and over again, but always with the same person. Ask God to fill your heart with love for your mate so you can love them as He loves them. God is good (Psalm 136:1) and all things do work together for good for those living for Him (Romans 8:28). The same is true if you aren’t married. You still need God to work in you and through you to unconditionally love those in your life.

What expectations did you bring into marriage? How have they played out? How have you adjusted? Where do you need to continue to adjust?

How do you see your marriage making you more like Jesus?

BLOG 534: GARBAGE ATTRACTS RATS (Ananias & Sapphira 1)

God’s people have always been attacked by Satan and his forces. When the early church first began, he did all he could to destroy it before it could grow. His attacks failed, so he tried a new approach. When external persecution didn’t stop the church’s growth (Acts 4:4) Satan tried **attacking from within**. He wanted to contaminate the spiritual life of the church members, as seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (**Read Acts 5:1-10**). God revealed to Peter that Satan had filled their heart so that they lied to the Holy Spirit by not being honest about the amount of money for which they sold their land (Acts 5:3).

The sin was not in keeping some of the money for themselves; that would have been fine. The sin was lying and saying they gave all the money to the church in order to impress their fellow believers. They did this despite the Holy Spirit convicting them that such a statement was wrong. To set an example of the importance of holiness, God took the lives of these two carnal believers (Acts 5:3-11). They still went to heaven, but lost opportunity to serve and grow in this life. Again, God took the work of Satan and used it instead for His own glory. The Christians were taught vividly of the importance of holiness, and as a consequence, unbelievers were attracted to Jesus (Acts 5:42 – 6:1).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Our pride often keeps us from sharing with others the areas in life where we are struggling. As a result, they stay hidden in the dark and we don’t have encouragement and support. If Ananias or Sapphira would have shared their struggle with greed with someone it would have brought the work of the enemy against them into the light and weakened it. Prayer

support and accountability would also have occurred. We play into the enemies' hands when we allow our pride to keep us from sharing our struggles with others.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Satan still uses the attack-within strategy today. He causes more damage to the church from within than he does through attacks from without. Christians hurting other Christians, churches hurting Christians, Christians hurting churches - this is a very common and successful approach of Satan even today. It can be more dangerous because when we are attacked from without, we recognize the hand of the enemy and pull together in unity. When it is from within, though, we often fail to recognize it for the attack that it is. Instead of joining together against it we allow divisions to come among God's people. And again, it is our pride that feeds this, wanting to be first and be right. It is our pride that keeps us from humbling ourselves and confessing our sins to God and others (when the sins have hurt others). Keeping our sin in the darkness allows it to grow; bringing it into the light exposes it and weakens it.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: "Satan filled your heart" (Acts 5:3) is Peter's appraisal of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. "Fill" (Greek 'pieroo') means "to fill to the full" and is the same word used for the filling of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18. There is no way of knowing to what extent they were demonized or exactly what Satan did. Surely, he helped them go in the direction they themselves chose and gave them opportunity to believe his lies so as to deceive themselves as to what they were really doing. He may have fed their greed or even encouraged fearful thoughts of not having enough money. He did this to counter the conviction of sin in them by the Holy Spirit. We do know they always had a free will to resist and are totally responsible for their thoughts and actions. We don't know today, either, where human responsibility ends and demonic influence takes over, but we know both are often present. Whatever the balance, the cause, symptoms, results and cure are the same. Don't waste time trying to figure out details about what demons do and how they do it. Focus on the solution, not the problem! And the solution starts with the person who is demonized admitting and confessing the sin in his life that has allowed the demons to work. They don't cause a sin, they enhance a sin that is already there, and so it must be removed and stopped so the demons stop as well. As it has been said, if you want to keep the rats away, get rid of the garbage!

Think about the statement "get rid of the garbage and the rats will go away." Is there any garbage in your life that is attracting rats (demons)? Think of this when you pray for others. Ask God to convict them of any garbage in their lives.

BLOG 535: IS YOUR CHURCH UNDER ATTACK? (Ananias & Sapphira 2)

We've been looking at the story of **Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-10**. There are many important lessons we can learn from this attack on the early church. We saw in the last blog that Satan uses pride to attack church members and weaken the Body of Christ. There are other lessons we can learn as well.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: Peter states that Satan enticed them to lie to the Holy Spirit. Whether this was literally Satan or one of his demons we don't know. Often, we say that 'Satan did _____' when we know it wasn't personally him, but done by his forces. Perhaps it was Satan himself since this was a direct, frontal attack on the young church. If the flame could be distinguished before it took root and spread, then the church could be severely crippled. If it was a demon assigned to destroy them, saying 'Satan' did it is still applicable for they are all his forces working with him for the same effect. It would be most unlikely that Satan would personally attack any of us today. He has far greater places to exert his influence and has plenty of demons to work against us. It doesn't take Satan to help us sin, the weakest demon, along without sin nature, can bring about plenty of sin in us because we freely go along with it.

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: The specific sins that Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of were greed, pride, lies and deception to cover the lies. They were also guilty of jealousy (of Barnabas Acts 4:32-37), and that is greed and pride combined. Their attitude to material things was idolatry, for they put something before God. Idolatry is really spiritual adultery (Jeremiah 3:8-10; Ezekiel 16:23-43; 23:24-30; Revelation 17:1-5). It is clearly forbidden by God (Exodus 20:3,4,23; 23:224). Pride is also seen in wanting to impress everyone with their generosity and have the affirmation which Barnabas had just received (Acts 4:32-37).

LESSON FOR TODAY 6: Fear of not having enough money for themselves in the future probably entered in as well. Seldom is there a sin that doesn't have fear as part of it somewhere! As do all sins, it starts in the mind (Judges 2:10-13; Ezekiel 14:7) and then becomes an action. When anything is more important to us than God there are demons who receive that adoration and 'worship' that we bestow on the object (Zechariah 10:2; 1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

LESSONS FOR TODAY 7: When a demon has access to one person that demon can also claim anyone that person becomes attached to, emotionally or physically (1 Corinthians 6:16). Emotional soul ties or physical sexual activity open a person to the demonizing of another.

LESSON FOR TODAY 8: Peter was made aware of what was happening so he could deal with the sin. As the leader he was responsible for those under him. God gives insights into the workings of demons so their work can be defeated to those with a need to know. When dealing with something demonic always pray for supernatural insight, wisdom and protection so you will be able to defeat the plans of the enemy. Some have the gift of distinguishing between spirits as part of their spiritual gift mix (1 Corinthians 12:10; Acts 13:6-12). If so, it must be used wisely and with maturity, always in total dependence on God so the person isn't misled or deceived.

LESSON FOR TODAY 9: God is a holy God and does not allow sin. He uses this first clear rebellion as an example to show how He feels about sin, but in His mercy, He doesn't deal with every sin among His believers in this way. God did the same when He first formed the Jewish nation (Exodus 32:1-35). In each case, starting the Jewish nation or the church, He showed His holiness by bringing strict judgment at the first sin. He doesn't enforce the same penalty of death on subsequent sinners, not because He shouldn't but because He chooses to show mercy. His failure to judge our every sin today is not weakness, but mercy, certainly not something we should take advantage of. Every sin of lying, greed, jealousy, fear, etc., like Ananias and Sapphira also deserves death like they received. If you don't know of anything else you can thank God for, then you can certainly thank Him for not striking you dead for sin.

LESSON FOR TODAY 10: God promises to bring good out of all things (Romans 8:28). That happened here. A new respect for God and fear of sin gripped the church (Acts 5:5, 11) which led to renewed reverence for God and an increased motivation for holiness. This strengthened the church and allowed God to work through them all the more (Acts 5:12, 15-16). A great number of people were attracted to Jesus and joined (Acts 5:14) but others without pure motives stayed away (Acts 5:13). God's power was manifested in many being healed and delivered from demonizing (Acts 5:15-16). To have God's power in your life or your church there must be cleansing from sin and a deep desire for holiness. Revival starts with a deep awareness of the holiness of God and sinfulness of man.

Satan still attacks the church today. That's why many churches struggle for years with inner conflicts and fights. They become weak and lack effectiveness for God. Pray for your church. If you sense anything that might be demonic influence, pray specifically against it and for the people involved.

BLOG 536: “I SHOULD BE HAPPY BUT I’M NOT” (Marriage Lies 3)

Are you as happy now as you expected to be when you got married? If you say “yes”, it means you’ve worked through some hard times, made adjustments and grown together. If you say “no”, then you’re stuck back where you started. The world promotes the **“I should be happy”** lie, everywhere: TV, movies, ads, music and books. But is happiness God’s highest purpose for marriage? Let’s start with some of the lies behind this lie which Satan uses to destroy marriages.

Behind the “I should be happy” lie is another one stating **“It’s their responsibility to make me happy.”** Our entitlement mentality, taught from childhood on, is that I’m supposed to be happy. “Others are to meet my needs and put me first.” “If this mate can’t make me happy, there must be someone else who can.” Lies, all of them.

A couple who had been married over 15 years, with children old enough to have a life of their own, came to me because they weren’t happy. They were bored, in a rut, and constantly picking at each other. They didn’t try to keep the peace as they did when the children were younger. He had promised he’d make her happy if she married him, and it wasn’t happening. She wasn’t making him happy either.

The truth is that **no one can MAKE you happy!** First, you have to define “happy.” When you do, you’ll find it’s a very shallow, self-centered emotion that is easily challenged by the reality of life. If the purpose of marriage is to make us happy, how can single people find fulfillment? Actually, we were made to need something much deeper than happiness and that is joy.

Satan uses this lie on **singles** as well. They can believe they need to be married to be happy. This lie makes them dissatisfied with the life God has given them. They look to others to meet needs only God can meet. Finding happiness can become the most important thing in life.

The **pursuit of happiness is an idol** we must destroy, or it will destroy us. Joy is deep inner satisfaction despite outer conditions. Happiness is dependent on our circumstances. Happiness is self-centered, joy is all encompassing. Happiness comes from being served, but joy from serving, as Jesus serves us. Life doesn’t always make us happy. It is hard. We stretch and grow through trying times. Our goal in marriage is oneness, not happiness. Take your unhappiness, discontent, etc. to God, not to your mate.

The other lie behind the “I should be happy” lie is, **the purpose of marriage is to be happy.** The entertainment industry sells us on the idea that we are to “live happily ever after” if we are with the right person. Yet most people “live miserably ever after.” But that isn’t the fault of marriage. As Christians, we are sometimes guilty of putting too much responsibility on the husband to meet all his wife’s needs and make her happy. We do the same to wives, whose submission is to bring happiness to marriage. When those impossible expectations aren’t met, we become discouraged with our mate or ourself.

The truth is that any time you take two very imperfect, self-centered human beings and put them together 24-7 you won’t get perfect unity. Not only do they have a sin nature, they are of the opposite sex, temperament, and often birth order. That is a recipe for disaster, not ecstasy.

The purpose of marriage is for our growth and God’s glory (Colossians 1:16-18). Holiness is much more important than happiness (1 Peter 1:16). Marriage gives us opportunity to face the ugliness in ourselves and grow through it so we become more like Jesus. Happiness is temporary, holiness is eternal. Happiness costs us nothing, it just happens to us. Holiness comes at the high cost of sacrifice, pain, obedience, self-denial and continual forgiveness. It is a fruit God’s Spirit produces in us (Galatians 5:22-23).

Instead of striving to be happy, **seek contentment**. It doesn't come naturally; it is a learned skill (Philippians 4:11-13). **Don't expect marriage or your mate to meet all your needs**. It will never happen. God won't let it happen. He is a jealous God and won't let anyone replace Him in your life. He will make sure your mate falls short so you still need and go to Him. Marriage can't and won't meet all your needs, but it can turn you to the One who can meet all of them (Philippians 4:19). Don't expect a finite being to meet needs only an eternal God can meet. Your relationship with your mate is temporary, but your relationship with God is eternal.

Marriage is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The end is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 9:29). Marriage, when faced from a Biblical world view, helps accomplish that. We see areas where we need to change and we have a mate who loves us unconditionally and helps us make those changes. God's purpose for your marriage is that you each look more like Jesus because of each other.

Has your marriage been accomplishing that? What is happening in your relationship now to stretch you and make you holy?

BLOG 537: THERE'S STILL VICTORY IN JESUS! (Moses 1)

During the time of **Moses** we see the greatest series of power encounters between God and Satan recorded in the Old Testament. It is a time of miracles (burning bush, 10 plagues, Red Sea opening) and direct conflict with the forces of darkness in the form of Jannes and Jambrees (2 Timothy 3:8; Exodus 7 & 8). These demonized magicians were able to perform counterfeit miracles in order to blind Pharaoh to God's superior power. God put a limit on their ability to counter His works (Exodus 8:18), but it was enough for Pharaoh to allow himself to be blinded to the truth (Exodus 8:19).

God used a series of 10 plagues to battle the gods of Egypt and defeat each of them in their areas of strength (Exodus 7 through 11). The idols the Egyptians served were powerless to protect themselves or the people who worshipped them. It was a time of great spiritual warfare. Not only were the plagues physically painful, but God allowed Satan's demons to attack those who weren't following Him. He used these demons to inflict fear, pain and destruction (Psalm 78:49). This is one of many examples in the Bible where God uses the destruction caused by Satan and demons for His ultimate plan and purpose.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: God does not prevent the battles we have with Satan, but He does give us victory through them. God protected and provided, but the Jews had to learn to fight their battles in His strength. God delivered them, but after deliverance (salvation) they had to learn to fight, as must we. We are not exempt from warfare and never will be, but we have His promises of ultimate victory when we trust Him and follow Him. Don't waste energy and prayer time asking for the battle to be milder so you can manage, instead ask for greater strength so you can fight and win. Don't try avoiding the battle, face it right on. And most of all, don't compromise or give in. Being taken captive by your enemies will NOT make your life any easier!

While these battles seemed to be between Pharaoh and Moses, the Egyptians and the Jews, what was happening on earth was really just a reflection of the battle going on in the heavenlies between God and Satan, angels and demons. Pharaoh is a picture of Satan who holds God's people in bondage and tries to destroy them. This began when he tried to destroy the male babies, thus hoping to end the line of the Messiah who would one day crush his head. It continued through slavery and culminated with his army attacking the unarmed Jews at the Red Sea. Each time God victoriously protected His people and the line of the Messiah. Egypt is a picture of the world and of Satan's power while the Jews are a picture God's people in bondage.

Deliverance came through innocent blood being shed to cover the sins of the guilty. Passover was, and still is, a picture of salvation in Jesus. The Red Sea deliverance was God's victory over Satan and the world in freeing His people from bondage. God delivers by blood (Passover lamb, Jesus the Lamb of God on the cross) and power (opening Red Sea showing His power over all, opening the grave Jesus was in showing He was alive). Deliverance is available for God's people, but death and judgment for those who use their free will to turn from Him (Exodus 12:12).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: What we face in this life is a reflection, a reverberation of the battle going on in the heavenlies between God's forces and Satan's forces. It is often acted out on earth. By our faithfulness and perseverance we are showing the enemy that God is greater than these attacks and ultimately will bring Him glory through it.

Think of some of the greatest spiritual battles you had to fight in your life. Did Jesus come through for you? Take some time to thank Him for His deliverances in the past. Thank Him for present and coming victories as well.

BLOG 538: MY OWN WORST ENEMY: ME (Moses 2)

God's miraculous provision did not end when the Jews left Egypt. He provided manna, kept them from getting sick, prevented clothing and shoes from wearing out and provided water when needed (Exodus 15-17). He led them by the cloud of fire, by His very Shekinah Presence. God protected and provided, but the Jews had to learn to fight their battles in His strength.

In their travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai the Jews had to travel near the land of the Amalekites. The Amalekites followed them, picking off the weak and sickly who weren't part of the main body of Israel (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Satan as a roaring lion looks for weak and sick sheep, those who aren't with the main body, and easily picks them off (1 Peter 5:8). We can't fight alone; we must be close to the main army. Be part of a sound Bible-believing church. Be involved in its ministry. Surround yourself with good Christian friends. When you notice one of them drifting do all you can to bring them back to the fellowship. When you are being attacked let others know what they can do to help you. Stragglers and the weak are easy targets for the enemy.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Amalek is a picture of the flesh. The flesh is always here to battle us. Demons don't always attack directly, they use our flesh (sin nature, natural tendency of self-centeredness and sin) as well. In fact, many times they don't have to do anything, they just let our sin nature defeat us. We, like the Jews, must learn to have victory over the flesh by prayer and fighting. Sins of the flesh include such things as lust, greed, laziness, self-indulgence, etc. – anything outside of God's will for us to be more like Jesus.

God allowed Amalek to continually attack so the Jews would stop and fight. They had to learn to fight. They were armed by God after the Egyptian army drowned (Exodus 14:30) but had to learn to use their weapons.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: God provides armor for us (Ephesians 6:10-20) but we must learn to use it as well. (See Ephesians 6 about the Armor of God for much more information about the weapons and equipment God provides for us.)

The Jews experienced victory when Moses prayed and the army fought behind Joshua (Exodus 17:8-15). Both were necessary for victory. Victory over Amalek was only temporary, for there were many future encounters to come.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: For us to have victory means we must pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) for it is part of the weaponry God gives us (Ephesians 6:18). We must also fight using the armor He has provided (Ephesians 6:10-17). Prayer without doing our best in life's battles isn't enough; neither is doing our best but neglecting to pray. It takes both faith and works for victory. Our warfare with the flesh will never end. Like the Jews with the Amalekites, battles will continue as long as we are on this earth.

Which of the 4 lessons listed above do you need to help you in life right now? What can you do, starting right now, to apply it to your life?

BLOG 539: THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEANLINESS (Moses 3)

We are discovering lessons about victory in spiritual warfare from **Moses** and the Exodus from Egypt. At Mt. Sinai God gave the **law** to Moses and the people of Israel. God's people needed God's truth to live and serve Him. God revealed His law to them, along with directions for the tabernacle and priesthood. Knowledge of and obedience to God's revealed truth is the key to victory (Psalm 119:9-11).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: We cannot have victory in our own lives, nor can we properly minister to those who are struggling, if there is sin in our lives and we aren't living in obedience to God's commands (2 Timothy 2:5; Exodus 23:21; Deuteronomy 27:10; 30:20; Exodus 24:7; Jeremiah 7:23; 1 Samuel 15:22; Hebrews 11:8; Joshua 24:24; John 14:15). Sin grieves (Ephesians 4:30) and quenches (1 Thessalonians 5:19) the Holy Spirit. God stands ready to help us and give us victory, but we cannot allow any sin in our lives. We must confess it (1 John 1:7-10) and live in total obedience in order to have victory.

A part of the law God gave them directly forbid any involvement with anything occult, anything demonic. "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. 10 Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. 13 You must be blameless before the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 18:9-13)

The death penalty was the consequence of being involved in any of these activities (Leviticus 20:2; Deuteronomy 13:10). Child sacrifice to the demon gods heads the list (Deuteronomy 18:10; 2 Kings 2:1-17). Worship of the stars, sorcery and divination were part of the worship of Molech. Divination was foretelling the future by hidden knowledge through supernatural powers (Ezekiel 21:21). Sorcery was used to predict the future based on the movement of the planets (Acts 8:9-24). Use of hallucinogenic drugs accompanied this (Galatians 5:20 'pharmakeia'). Omens were supposedly discovered by inspecting the entrails of animals, following the flights of birds or the motions of snakes. Witchcraft was a means of calling on demons for information, often through use of drugs or perfumes. It is strongly forbidden (2 Kings 9:22; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Micah 5:12; Nahum 3:4) and any who were involved in this were put to death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:27).

The list of forbidden occult practices continues with casting spells, something done by charms, spells or curses (Acts 16:16-18). A medium is someone through whom a demon speaks (Isaiah 8:19; Leviticus 19:31; 20:27). A spiritist is similar. The term usually referred to a male witch who would contact demons to try to get information from them. Necromancy, consulting the dead, was also done by contact with demons who impersonated the person who had died. This is strongly forbidden by

God (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; 2 Kings 23:24; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14) and is what Saul did at the end of his life (1 Samuel 28:7-25).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: There are many similar ways of contacting demons today as well, but every way of contacting demons is strictly forbidden. Usually, they camouflage who they are so as to make the practice more acceptable. Contact with any power other than God is strictly forbidden. Even if the person isn't aware it is a demon, when they open themselves up to a power that is not God then the demon(s) can and will use that to claim control over them. These include consulting a spiritist, using a Ouija board, participating in occult or Satanic worship, taking part in a séance or any number of forbidden practices. If someone has been involved in these things their power can be broken by confession and putting the sin under the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9). Also pray to take back any access the sin had given to demons.

If there is any sin in your life, take time to confess it now. If you have ever been involved in any occult practices and haven't confessed them as sin and put them under the blood of Jesus, do so now. If you need help email me at .

BLOG 540: UNTO THE 3RD & 4TH GENERATION... (Moses 4)

The first books of the Bible have a lot to say about spiritual warfare. The battle started in Eden and continued throughout the centuries. Moses had many conflicts with Satan's forces in Egypt and traveling to the Promised Land. On the way God gave the people the **Ten Commandments** to instruct them in how to live a victorious life for God. Let's look at some lessons we can learn from them. Read them in **Exodus 20**.

God's first commandment is that there are no Gods but Him. Then He forbids them to make any idols to worship (Exodus 20:4-5). After the commandment to not make any idols God gives the reason: He is a jealous God "punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:4-5). God does not hold us accountable for the sins of our ancestors (Deuteronomy 24:16) but the consequences of their sins does pass on from generation to generation (Ezekiel 18:2). There is a big difference between 'sins' (individual acts of sin) and 'sin' (general term for the culmination of all sin together).

One of the main ways sin passes from generation to generation is through demonic control. When a person opens themselves to demonizing, that demon claims them and all they have. When they have children the demon then claims the child as well (Exodus 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 5:8-9). There are many examples of this in Scripture (Nehemiah 1:4-9; Jeremiah 14:20; Daniel 1:1-19). This goes on from generation to generation until broken by prayer in Jesus' name. As believers we have authority to break this in Jesus' name (1 Corinthians 7:14).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: When one person opens themselves up to demonic influence, that person's descendants are also at risk of demonizing. When a demon has access to a person, he also claims right to all that person has, including their children. The Bible says these sins pass on down to the third or fourth generation (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:8-9; Exodus 34:6-7). Ancestral, or generational access is one of the most common openings for demonized.

This is especially true of first born males, but certainly not limited to them. Satan seeks to claim them because God says they belong to Him (Exodus 34:20). This is by no means limited to firstborn males, or even to males. Any child is open to this. If you notice some of the same problems in your life as in your siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, or grandparents it could very well be ancestral demonizing. The same demons have access to those in the family and do the same work in various members (not all members, that would be too obvious). They claim the blood line or family name and use that as access. If you see some patterns in the symptoms or characteristics of demonizing that

were covered previously in others in your family that could show ancestral access. That is why so often a boy who hates his father for beating his mother grows up to beat his own wife, or a child of an alcoholic becomes an alcoholic himself. It is not uncommon to observe generations of abuse, addiction, hatred, superstition and fear, pride, control and manipulation, rejection, sexual sins and perversions, aberrant religious beliefs, witchcraft, and rebellion etc.

Generational bondage can be broken by personally repenting of and confessing the sins of past generations. Claim the blood of Christ as stronger than your blood line and put that access under the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:15). Claim that you are a "new creation, old things have passed away, all things have become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). State that you are "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13). Then ask God to turn that curse into a blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: When counseling someone who you feel may be demonized be sure to start by asking questions about similar sins and problems in other members of the family. This is especially true if the person struggled with the issue since they were quite young. Generational bondage can be broken by putting the sins of past generations under the blood of Jesus and forbid any of Satan's forces to make any claim against you through them. Claim the blood of Christ as stronger than your blood line and put any demonic access under the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:15). Claim that you are a "new creation, old things have passed away, all things have become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). The person must not allow himself to participate in that sin any more or the access will again be open. "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Do you see a connection between a sin you really struggle with and a similar sin pattern in a close relative? If so, pray and ask God to break any connection and remove any access any demons may claim to work in you because of an ancestor's sin. If you need help write me at .

BLOG 541: YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW! (Moses 5)

Failure to enter the land Despite all God's show of power and clear provision, the Jews failed to enter the land because of their fear of the giants who were already living there. Quite naturally, they had chosen the best land for themselves. But God promised this to His people. Instead of trusting Him they let their **fear** control them. Therefore, God set the generation who left Egypt aside, causing them to wander for 40 years until all those over 20 had died.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: The Jews in Moses' day never went into the land God had promised them. They never attained spiritual victory or maturity because their fear and lack of faith defeated them. Today fear is still one of Satan's greatest weapons, something that keeps many believers from growing to maturity and attaining spiritual victory. If you struggle with fear this is where your battle must be won. Maybe you don't call it 'fear' but rather refer to it as worry, concern, anxiety, nervousness, fretfulness, apprehension or some similar term. Believe God's promises and move forward in faith, not fear (Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; I Samuel 17:45-47; II Samuel 22:33-35,40-41; Philippians 4:6-7; 4:13; 2 Timothy 1:7 Exodus 14:13). Write some of these down, memorize them, and quote them whenever your faith struggles.

Possessing our inheritance While the generation of Jews who left Egypt did not enter the land, the next generation did. Please read **Numbers 32:18-22** for it describes their key to victory. They determined to possess it (Numbers 32:18) and armed themselves for battle (Numbers 32:20). They then moved ahead in faith in God, trusting and following Him (Numbers 32:21) and God gave them victory (Numbers 32:22).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: The physical warfare of the Jews over their enemies in the Old Testament pictures our spiritual warfare against our enemies (the flesh and Satan) in the New Testament. We can learn many spiritual lessons from their physical battles. Numbers 32:18-22 gives the key for our victory in spiritual warfare. First of all, we must be totally committed to having victory (Numbers 32:18) and willing to pay whatever price is necessary (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). How badly do you want to experience all God has for you? How willing are you to fight for it no matter the cost?

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Arm yourself. Make sure you understand and use the armor that is ours (Ephesians 6:10-20). Put on your armor daily and keep it on (see Ephesians 6 for more information). Then move out in faith. Attack the enemy, whatever is challenging you (Numbers 32:21), but do it in God's power (Luke 10:17-20). Don't sit back, don't avoid confrontation, seek out your weaknesses and areas of temptation and defeat them. Then God promises ultimate victory (Numbers 32:22). The Jews challenge was to conquer the Promised Land. 'Self' is our land to be subdued, to be tamed and brought under control. It is ours for the taking, although it requires lifelong warfare to gain and keep victory.

Are you surprised to find living the Christian life still such a daily battle? Do you get discouraged and want to give up? Are you using the armor provided by God? There is no way to avoid the battle if you want ultimate victory. Your choice is to either keep fighting or give up in defeat. Pray for the courage and energy to stay faithful.

BLOG 542: POWER ENCOUNTERS IN EPHEBUS (Paul in Ephesus 1)

As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, it encountered fierce opposition from those who worshipped the Greco-Roman gods and goddesses. Satan's power behind them came in direct conflict with God's power in the Gospel. Paul was caught between the two often as he traveled and preached the good news. One such battle took place in **Ephesus**, where pagan goddess Artemis was worshipped.

The people there were Asiatic and thus animists who were really worshipping demons. Artemis was a widely worshipped deity whose temple in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. She was recognized by her followers as the greatest power in the universe. She was seen as savior, lord and queen and was worshipped by many long festivals. 'Missionaries' were sent out to spread her message. This cult was very influential and very rich.

Of course, the power behind Artemis was demonic, and those who promoted her worship knew it. They used those powers to help her reputation, and therefore theirs as well, grow and expand. She was recognized as the goddess over the underworld and the one with authority over all demons. In fact, these demons who served her were given Jewish, Egyptian and Greek names. The 'magic' she had, the supernatural power over natural forces, was all Satanic.

Since Artemis was worshipped there, Ephesus became the main center for pagan demonic worship in all Asia Minor. Because of its key place in Asia Minor, geographically as well as culturally, Paul visited Ephesus at least twice (Acts 18:19-21; 19:1 – 20:1). Eventually the center of early Christianity moved from Jerusalem to Ephesus, then later to Rome itself. John and Mary lived in Ephesus. Because of its importance, Satan and his forces did all they could to oppose this. That is why spiritual warfare came to a head at Ephesus, as can be seen in the book of Acts as well as the epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:10-18), which was a circular letter read in all the churches in the area.

Luke records several of these power encounters between God and Satan during Paul's first visit to **Ephesus** in **Acts 19**.

A power encounter is a crisis point occurring in the on-going spiritual warfare between God and Satan. Paul was bringing the kingdom of light into Satan's kingdom of darkness. Satan was doing all he could to keep the area under his control. God gave Paul the ability to show God's greater power by doing "signs, wonders and miracles" (2 Corinthians 12:12; Romans 15:19). Towards the end of Paul's time there, God worked in a special way through Paul to show the people the power of Paul's God and message.

LESSON FOR TODAY In cultures today which don't have a Christian heritage or much of a gospel witness, God still, many times, uses physical healing and, deliverance from demonic influence and even dreams to show His power and bring others to His truth. I personally have seen some and heard of many other occurrences in India where God was showing His power is greater than the demonic gods that control them by fear. I have personally talked with those who have been supernaturally healed, delivered from demonic possession or protected from evil forces. God spoke to some in dreams telling them about salvation in Jesus. Cripples and those with terrible illnesses were told in dreams they would be healed by Jesus and it happened just as they were told. In the USA these things would be mocked and rejected, but in primitive areas of the world, where Satan use power to rule through fear, God shows His greater power to bring salvation, deliverance and healing when He chooses.

Pray for those around the world who have never heard of Jesus but instead are imprisoned in fear of the evil forces that control them. Thank God for the privilege you have had of seeing God's great power at work in your life.

BLOG 543: POWER ENCOUNTER 1: HANDKERCHIEF HEALING (Paul in Ephesus 2)

In our previous blog we began looking at the power encounter between God and Satan in **Ephesus (Acts 19)**. Pagan idol worship had a strong foothold there and Satan didn't want to allow any of God's light into the area he ruled with darkness. Artemis worship abounded and was heavily entrenched in the culture and lives of the people. Those who merchandized Artemis idols made a good profit by selling amulets and charms that claimed to have power to heal. Many of the illnesses were demonic, as were the 'cures.'

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Satan can cause illness: crippled limbs (Luke 13:11), Paul's thorn in the flesh (eye disease? - II Corinthians 12:7), muteness (sometimes dumbness, too - Matthew 9:32-33; 12:22; Mark 9:17-18,24-25), blindness (Matthew 12:22), seizures (Mark 1:26; 9:17-18,20,22,25; Matthew 17:15,18; Luke 9:39), deafness (Mark 9:17-18,20,25), sores (skin cancer?) (Job 2:7), boils and other painful afflictions (Psalm 78:49 - the plagues in Egypt were demon-caused), physical torments of all kinds (Revelation 9:5,10), painful illness (Job2:7-8), and even death (Job 1:19). Since he can cause these things he can seem to 'heal' them by stopping what he did/does to cause them in the first place. Only God can heal, but Satan can counterfeit that by making it seem like he heals.

If the God Paul preached was greater than Satan and the demons who worked through Artemis, then everyone assumed He would be able to do what they did and heal people. "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them" (Acts 19:11-12). These free articles of Paul's worked much, much better than Satan's counterfeits.

LESSONS FOR TODAY 2: This is not a standard way to evangelize or to do deliverance. In fact, Paul probably wasn't aware of it when this began. Perhaps helpers or others took these cloths and gave them to needy friends. God honored their faith and used this to verify His power through His servant Paul. Of course, it wasn't Paul who healed, only God. But this validated Paul's claims to have the best and right power with him. It was a necessary first step to gain a hearing so Paul

could spread the good news of Jesus Christ. We must not get involved in objects that seem to have supernatural power for our full faith and attention must only be on God Himself. These things are counterfeit, even superstitions, good luck charms, etc., are to be totally avoided.

We must be careful today to focus all our worship only on God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Images, pictures, icons and even crosses are simply means to an end and are not to be given the reverence that only God deserves. Even His holy Word, although containing the very words of God Himself, is not to be elevated in any way. The book itself is just paper and ink. It is the truth it contains that is special. Even though we are to show respect to the book in whatever form it is printed, our worship is reserved only for the Author of the book – God Himself. John says we are to keep ourselves from idols (1 John 5:21), and that means Christian idols as well. God does not share His glory, it all and only belongs to Him!

Search your heart and life to make sure you haven't elevated a certain building, location, art object book to the place you hold God in your heart. No idols means just that – no idols.

BLOG 544: POWER ENCOUNTER 2: SONS OF SCEVA (Paul in Ephesus 3)

We have been looking at power encounters between God's people and Satan's forces in **Ephesus**, as recorded in **Acts 19**. God showed His power by healing some who were ill, even using sweaty work cloths of Paul's to do so. Naturally that caused quite a stir in the city.

As word of God's power through Paul spread there were those who saw Jesus' name as a magic charm they could use to their own advantage. "Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, 'In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.' Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding" (Acts 19:13).

Sceva, a Jew, was a self-proclaimed chief priest. He claimed to do Jewish exorcism but used occult ways to accomplish this. He thought he would try this new 'charm' so he could have better results in driving demons out, and therefore earning high fees for doing so. However, using Jesus' name just brought him and his sons' misery because they weren't believers. The people learned that Jesus isn't a magic word to use. Only a personal relationship with Him will bring victory.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Often demons work together in cooperation to make it seem like the human they used had the power to cast out demons. Really, they were just working together to make it seem that way. One demon would attack a person, then another would indwell a false deliverer so that when the demon was commanded to be gone it would leave. It was all set up to make it look like the person had power to deliver. This deceived the person himself and those watching. But this time the demons from the demonized man overpowered the demonized deliverer and beat him up. Demons don't always work together, though. They are filled with hate and jealousy and often take it out on each other, as happened this time.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: When we feel confusion in our minds it may be from demonic interference, trying to confuse and mislead us. Other times, though, what we sense as confusion is conflict among the demons themselves as they struggle with each other for authority and influence, especially the leader is gone working elsewhere. The distraction and/or confusion the demonized person senses could be conflict among the demons themselves, for their self-centeredness, pride and ego isn't just manifested against us but against each other also. They cooperate out of fear and being overpowered, not for any other reason.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Our power and authority are in Jesus and His name, but we are not to use His name as a magic charm. We must always make sure there is no sin in our life, that we are right with God, and, of course, that we are His child through faith in Jesus. We are to pray “in Jesus’ Name (power, authority).” Jesus gave the disciples that power and commanded them to use it (Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:17; Mark 6:7; 16:17). They cast out demons as a regular part of their ministry (Mark 9:38; Luke 10:17). Paul cast out demons (Acts 16:16-18; 19:12) and so did Philip (Acts 8:7). When trying to do it in their own strength (without dependence on God) they failed (Mark 9:18, 28-29). Paul himself said, “In the name of Jesus I command you to come out” (Acts 16:16-18). It’s not the words – it’s the Person whose power is behind them.

Sometimes we are guilty of rattling off “In Jesus’ name. Amen” after a prayer without really thinking about the implications and ramifications of all it means. Pay attention to what you are saying next time you say it.

BLOG 545: POWER ENCOUNTER 3: BURNING SORCERY BOOKS (Paul in Ephesus 4)

Several power encounters between Paul and the forces of Satan took place in **Ephesus (Acts 19)**. We have looked at these in previous blogs. Satan isn’t giving up, though. The battle gets stronger and stronger, but God always wins!

As it became more and more obvious that God’s power shown through Paul was much greater than that the followers of Artemis claimed, many came to God for salvation. “When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (Acts 19:17-20).

LESSONS FOR TODAY 1: “Sorcery scrolls” refers to magic texts, adjurations, formulas, protection rituals, curses, incantations and similar things. Such things exist today as well and have an amount of power behind them – demonic power. Keep away from such things. If someone you minister to has them, they must be destroyed – anything that can be used by demons to gain access to their lives or family must be destroyed.

When the Jews took possession of Canaan under Joshua, they were told to not keep any of the objects they captured. Even animals and children were to be destroyed. They had been dedicated to Satan and were claimed by him. Those who used these things would be opening themselves up to the demonic powers to whom they had been dedicated. Today we must watch for things like literature and objects from other cults and religions, Ouija boards and other occult paraphernalia, pagan objects from primitive cultures, objects from Masonic or other secret societies, some Native American artifacts and the like. Pornography, drug or alcoholic supplies, music with a black or evil dimension, even certain movies or articles of clothing dedicated to darkness can allow access.

The solution is to remove and destroy such objects as being openings for demonic access. Ask for forgiveness for having them, cleanse the room from their presence, take back any access the enemy may claim and dedicate the space as well as yourself to Jesus. Ask Him to reveal to you anything else that may need to be dealt with.

When a room or object is under the control of an evil spirit for whatever reason they claim, dedicating it to God by painting crosses by dipping a finger in oil and making them on a wall is a good practice. Playing Christian music and leaving a small light on also are offensive to the forces of darkness. Of course, praying and quoting scripture while making the crosses is important, too. We

as a Christian have great power in blessing people, especially our own families. 'God bless you' is more than a slang or shallow comment. There's real power in it when one means it that way. It's a privilege to use and repeat it often to people. Distance doesn't seem to affect it at all. Of course, there is something even more special about touching a person when we pray or ask God to bless them, but when at a distance it carries just as well. The power is in God Who is everywhere (omnipresent). Satan and demons are limited to one place at a time so they are at a distinct disadvantage in this, too.

This extended time in Ephesus turned out to be Paul's last freedom of movement for some time. From Ephesus he went to Jerusalem (Acts 21) where he was falsely charged and arrested (Acts 22). He spent the next several years in prison, finally being transferred to Rome (Acts 23-28) where the book of Acts ends. Paul was eventually released to travel some more, but his health had been broken and the brunt of the load of ministry which he had carried was now spread to many new evangelists and missionaries. Paul was again arrested and this time put to death in Rome. But during his travels and imprisonment he wrote letters to churches to stay in touch. We can learn much about spiritual warfare from these letters.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: It must have been very frustrating for Paul to have to write letters to people and places he wanted to see in person. No doubt he wondered what purpose God would ever have in that. However, that is what God used to form the majority of the New Testament and its teaching. Were Paul free to visit these places in person, millions of Christians for two thousand years would not have had these priceless letters and their teachings. God always has a purpose in what He does. When things don't seem to make sense to you trust that God knows what He is doing (Romans 8:28).

Ask God to make you sensitive to anything you have in your possession that may be an opening for demonic attack. It could be a pagan artifact, a book or token from another cult or religion, even something harmless in itself but that comes from an evil person or was used for evil purposes. Listen to anything God may put in your heart or mind. If there is something, pray about what God wants you to do with it and obey what He says.

BLOG 546: ALL ATTACKS ARE FATHER-FILTERED (Job 1)

Satan not only attacks God's kingdom on a world-wide scale, but he opposes individuals who are part of that kingdom as well. **Job** is a prime example of this. He lived around the same time as Abraham. He is a picture of a righteous man, following God and facing his own warfare because he is faithful to God (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). There are several lessons we can learn about spiritual warfare from Job's conflict with Satan. Read **Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7**.

One of the ways Satan attacks God's kingdom and people is by bringing accusations of sin against believers (Zechariah 3:1-4; Revelation 12:10). Because God is holy and must judge sin, Satan tries to point out the sins of believers in order to bring God's wrath upon us. However we are safe from condemnation because Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross (Romans 8:1). Still, Satan is forever tattling on us to God.

We don't know how Satan is allowed in God's presence, but in some way or form this must happen for he accuses Job to God (Job 1:1-6; 2:1-7). God allowed Satan to attack Job, but with certain limits which God imposes (Job 1:12; 2:6).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: All Satan's attacks against us are 'Father filtered,' allowed by God for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28). This painful suffering of Job's served as an example of faithfulness to all heavenly beings, and to the millions who have read of Job in the Bible.

Satan can only do what God allows. Satan had to have permission to attack Job, and even then, God limited what he could do (Job 1-2; 1 Kings 22:19-23). God actually uses his evil plans for good (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). He used the lies the demons gave the false prophets to bring about the destruction God wanted (1 Kings 22:19-23). He used Satan's afflictions on Job to show he was a faithful witness and example to Satan and his forces then, and to untold millions of believers since. He used all that Joseph went through to save the nation of Israel (Genesis 50:20). He uses what you and I go through for our growth and for His glory as well. When you look at nature, you see God is a God who never wastes anything, but makes multiple good uses of everything. He does the same with our pain and suffering as well. Not one tear, not the slightest struggle is wasted but is used for His plan in our lives (Romans 8:28).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: One other item of interest in this account is the way Satan was able to attack Job and his family. He used evil men (Job 1:13-15), nature (lightning, Job 1:16), hostile men (take animals, kill servants, Job 1:17), natural disaster (wind to destroy a house and kill Job's children, Job 1:18-19), and sickness and pain against Job himself (Job 2:6). Other examples of these in the Bible include: crippled limbs (Luke 13:11), Paul's thorn in the flesh (eye disease? - II Corinthians 12:7), muteness (sometimes dumbness, too - Matthew 9:32-33; 12:22; Mark 9:17-18,24-25), blindness (Matthew 12:22), seizures (Mark 1:26; 9:17-18,20,22,25; Matthew 17:15,18; Luke 9:39), deafness (Mark 9:17-18,20,25), sores (skin cancer?) (Job 2:7), boils and other painful afflictions (Psalm 78:49 - the plagues in Egypt were demon-caused), and physical torments of all kinds (Revelation 9:5,10).

While we aren't to fear Satan or give him credit for more power than he has, still he clearly has more ability to use nature, people and sickness than we often recognize. He has many weapons in his warfare against us.

While not every natural disaster, attack by evil people or physical sickness is from Satan, this probably does happen more often than we imagine. We aren't to fear him for God is greater (1 John 4:4), but we are to recognize the attacks of our enemy so we can properly fight against them (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). If you are facing some of these right now, follow Job's example of not sinning by accusing God of wrongdoing (Job 1:22; 2:9-10). Stay faithful to God and keep your trust in Him no matter what (Job 1:21). See it as part of your warfare and don't let Satan defeat you through it.

Does it give you comfort to know that all Satan's attacks against you are Father-filtered? Think of someone going through a really rough time and share this truth with them. Visit, call, write or email them to remind them that God is still in control of all that happens.

BLOG 547: WHY SUFFERING? (Job 2)

One of the first questions to come up when we read the story of **Job** is to wonder why God allowed this to happen to him when he clearly didn't deserve it. Why do the innocent suffer? Let's see what we can learn from Job. First, read **Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7**.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Why does God allow people to suffer and struggle? How can a God of love allow so much evil to continue? God doesn't defend Himself or explain what He allows. He gives us a free will choice as to whose kingdom we will pursue. Sin and the resulting evil are the natural consequences of turning from Him.

The fact of pain in the world is not a reason to see God as less than loving. Still, innocent people suffer. We can't try to evaluate God's person and character by these things for He has proven His character and love by leaving heaven, becoming a man, living on earth, then going to the cross to take on the punishment for every sin we would ever commit. That proves His love for us beyond a shadow of a doubt. If it weren't for that we would all spend eternity in hell. So, anything less than hell

from now on is because of His grace and mercy. Why He seems to show more love and mercy to some than others is not up to us to judge. God isn't accountable to us. We cannot stand in judgment of Him until we know all the facts as He knows them and see everything as He sees it. Many things seem unfair to little children but they must trust their parents. Getting an injection from a doctor, having a pretty shiny knife taken away, things like these seem to a child that a parent doesn't love them. But a child doesn't have the perspective to truly understand all that is involved and we don't either. We do know that facing things we don't understand gives us an opportunity to trust. Our faith is stretched and we grow. God is glorified as we see Him deliver and as others watch us continually trust Him no matter what happens. Spiritual warfare itself is often very painful. It is just one of many forms of suffering God uses for our good and for His glory. Often deliverance isn't a sudden, complete act. God allows the struggle to go on for it teaches us to fight and to trust Him.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: A related question is why God would allow Satan to attack us at all when He could prevent it. If He is a God of love why not deny Satan and demons any opportunity to attack? Then we wouldn't have to resist or learn to fight? Life would be much simpler and easier. But that isn't God's purpose, nor is it how He works. Why didn't God just kill all the Canaanites and not have the Jews have to go through warfare against them? The Jews had a free will to follow God or not, and if they followed, they needed to learn to obey and to fight as God would have them. Perseverance, faith, teamwork, patience, obedience and many lessons were tied up in this. God used it to stretch their faith, to give them opportunities to grow and see Him work through them and to show others His glory by what He could do through His people. The same is true of us today.

Do you still ask God "why" questions all the time? What answer does He give you? What can you tell someone who asks why God allows suffering in the world?

BLOG 548: ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS (Joshua 1)

The book of **Joshua** is one of the most detailed books on spiritual warfare in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 tells us that the things that happened to the Jews who left Egypt and eventually settled the Promised Land happened as examples for us. Physical events in the Old Testament teach spiritual truths in the New Testament. That is true of the book of Joshua.

In Genesis we see the need of salvation – man is sinful. The book starts in Eden in God's presence and ends with the Jews in captivity in Egypt. Exodus brings deliverance by innocent blood being shed (Passover) and by power (Red Sea open, close). Then in Leviticus instruction is given as to how to live for God now that they are delivered. In Numbers they start learning to apply what God has taught them about winning battles they face in life. Deuteronomy reviews lessons from the past about obeying God. God's people must learn from the past so they can move ahead in the future. Then comes Joshua, entering the Promised Land (God's perfect will for them) and conquering through warfare. That's where we are in our Christian life: God has redeemed us and taught us in His Word and from past experiences. Now we pursue His perfect will for our lives but find we must fight to achieve what He has for us.

LESSON FOR TODAY: The same happens today – God freely gives us salvation and has peace, rest and victory available as we live in His perfect will, but there is a battle involved for us to experience and enjoy those blessings. We fight our sinful nature and we fight Satan's demons who try to do all they can to keep us from experiencing all God has for us. It's available, it's ours, but we must battle to reach it.

Some Christians believe that if they trust God enough then He will remove all obstacles and bless them with a simple, easy life. Others think that God owes them health, wealth and whatever they want. The truth is that we are in a lifelong battle if we want to remain faithful to God's kingdom. If we give in or compromise, then the battle stops until we start living in faithfulness and obedience

again. We are living in enemy-occupied territory seeking to overthrow the prince of this world and release as many of his prisoners as possible. Of course, he will oppose all we do!

The generation of Jews who left Egypt died in unbelief, not attaining all the blessings God had for them in this life. They lacked faith and obedience. Their children took over – each generation must pick up where the last generation stopped or failed. They needed faith to face the giants their parents feared. They couldn't do this in their own strength, only in God's.

Those who followed their leader Joshua had victory. Joshua's name in Hebrew (the Old Testament) is the same as Jesus in Greek (the New Testament). They both mean "God is salvation" (Luke 1:21), recognizing that physical and spiritual deliverance only comes from God. The key to our victory over opposing forces (Satan, the world and the flesh) is in our faithfully following Jesus.

What are some of the most memorable victories you have had in your Christian life? What lessons can you learn from them? How do these lessons apply to battles you are currently fighting?

BLOG 549: CROSSING OUR JORDON (Joshua 2)

In the last blog we saw the importance of following our leader, Jesus, just as the Jews followed **Joshua** to victory. Theirs were physical battles while ours are spiritual, but the lessons are the same. From the very start, God was teaching them about spiritual warfare.

First, they would have to **cross the Jordan River** which was at flood stage (Joshua 3:15). Humanly speaking it was the worst time to try to cross. Read **Joshua 3:1-17**. Human wisdom said to not try, but God chose this time to show His power. God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). By following God, the Jews found there was no opposition because the residents of Canaan were not expecting them to cross at that time. It was also a time when much food was available in the land and the morale of the Canaanites had been undermined by word of God's work through the Jews (Joshua 5:1). God miraculously opened the Jordan, as He had the Red Sea for the previous generation (Exodus 4:3). Only now He expected them to step into the water first (Joshua 3:14-17), not stand on dry ground and watch.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: God told them to cross the Jordan at the worst time and place. It was flooding so the water was very deep and fast-moving. Many times, it seems to us that God is expecting the impossible from us. He guides us into impossible situations and then expects us to trust Him to lead us through them. If it seems that way sometimes it is because that is how He does indeed work. Don't complain to Him about your dreadful circumstances. He already knows. You are right where He wants you. Stay faithful and watch Him work. The worse the problem the more glory He gets for helping you through it. Sometimes He will remove the problem, other times He will help you endure it. Either way you win and He is glorified!

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: At the Red Sea the Jews stood still and watched what God did, but now God is requiring more of them. They have to step into the water while it is still in flood stage. That meant stepping off a steep bank into fast-moving very deep water. Step out in faith is not easy. It's much easier to sit back and watch Him work, like he has in the past. But that was the past and this is now, so act in faith even if everything seems impossible. Step out in faith, trusting He is leading you, and He will be there. Make sure He is leading and you aren't acting on your own, though.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: As we mature in faith, God expects more and more of us. The trials get harder for the Jews and God expects more from them as they grow in faith. Your tests and challenges are much greater than when you were a young Christian so you will continue to grow. A muscle grows stronger when it is taken to its limit and then a little beyond. That is how our faith

muscles grow as well. God promises He won't give us too much if we lean on His guidance, power and grace (1 Corinthians 10:13) .

The conquest of the land and settling on the ground God gave them required battle after battle. Joshua prepared to enter by meditating on God's Word (Joshua 1:8) and by following Jesus (Joshua 5:13-14). We, too, are to meditate on God's Word (Psalm 1:1-3) and follow Jesus as well (Mark 1:17; 2:14).

Are your battles getting harder? Don't let that discourage you. God is faithfully working to make you more like Jesus (Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:28-29). Is there a step of faith God wants you to take but you are holding back? Talk to Him about it now and commit to step out in obedience.

BLOG 550: YOUR BATTLE OF JERICHO (Joshua 3)

The first battle the Jews faced when they entered the Promised Land was at **Jericho (Joshua 5:13 – 6:27)**. What a strange battle plan God had for them! It is important to note that no two battles, then or now, are exactly alike. At the Red Sea the Jews were to stand still and see God deliver (Exodus 14:3), but against Amalek the men were to take up weapons and fight (Exodus 17:9). Now at Jericho they were told to march around the walls in faith and God would take care of the walls (Joshua 6:1-3). The Jews followed the Ark of the Covenant which symbolized the seat of God's presence.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Each battle we fight will be different than the battles others fight, and even different than past battles we were involved in. We must follow God's lead each time. There is no one way or 'best' way – be sensitive and follow God. Don't look for a magic formula – obedience to God brings victory, disobedience brings defeat.

Despite victory over great Jericho, the Jews were soundly defeated in their next battle against a small outpost called Ai because there was sin in the camp (Joshua 6:18-19; 7:13). Achan tried to keep that which belonged to God. This sin was confessed and removed from the camp, and then there was victory at Ai. We, too, must make sure there is no sin in our lives or we won't have victory but will live in defeat.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: An entirely new strategy was used for victory at Ai – an ambush from behind the town. There is no magic formula, no one human leader, and no ritual that guarantees victory. Sensitivity to God's leading and following His Spirit is the only sure way to win. Don't be judging the way God leads others, and don't limit Him in what He wants to do or how He wants to do it to bring victory in your situation.

After these victories the Jews paused to regroup and refocus. By this time the tribes in the north and south had started unifying to better stand against the Jews.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Satan's opposition grows stronger in time. The enemy does not give up and surrender. He often gathers more demons and even motivates unbelieving human beings in opposition against God's people. Big victories on our part often bring bigger opposition from Satan and his demons.

First the Jews **faced the southern tribes (Joshua 9:1-2; 10:5)**. Their biggest danger wasn't their enemy without, but the enemy within – fear. That is one of the demon's best tools to defeat us, but God clearly commands us to have faith, not fear (Joshua 10:8). When the Jews fought as directed by God, He brought victory (Joshua 10:11). He even miraculously caused the sun to stand still so there was extended daylight to complete the victory (Joshua 10:12-14).

One of the tribes in the south, the Gibeonites, tried an entirely different but vastly more successful strategy – deception. They sent representatives who pretended to come from far away so as to not seem to be a threat to the Jews, even going so far as to encourage the Jews to make a treaty with them (Joshua 9:3-14).

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: When the enemy can't win by direct conflict, he often resorts to something more subtle and often more effective – deceitfulness. As in Eden, Satan is most dangerous when using deception and lies. We must make sure we know and apply the truth, for while deception brings bondage, truth brings freedom (John 8:32). The better you know God's Word the more protected you will be against deception.

Are you concerned that God is working in your life differently than in the lives of others around you? Are you tempted to try to pattern your Christian walk to match that of friends? If so, you must have discovered that doesn't work. Let God work in you His way, for you are a unique creation of His and He knows just what is best for you.

BLOG 551: WILL THE BATTLES EVER END? (Joshua 4)

We saw in the last blog how the Jews won their battles against Jericho and the tribes in the south of the Promised Land. During this time the **northern tribes** had time to unify and prepare (**Joshua 11:1-5**). Victory in the north did not come in one quick, short battle as we would often like to see happen, but was a slow and gradual process. The enemy just didn't quit. Again, the greatest problem the Jews faced is fear. The same is true today. God encouraged them in their faith (Joshua 11:6) and brought the victory as they fought (Joshua 11:8). We must fight but it is God who brings victory.

The last great battle to claim and settle the Promised Land, the place of God's blessing, was against the giants (Anakim, Numbers 13:28; Joshua 11:21). It was fear of them that kept the Jews out of the land in Moses' day.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: This was a retest. When we are defeated God allows us to face the same enemy time and time again until we learn to have victory. This final series of battles were the hardest, for it was Satan's last great stand and he did all he could to hold on to his territory. Joshua and Caleb were old by this time, but they still battled and God gave victory. As long as we are alive we will face battles, we never grow too old to keep growing and serving.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: There are numerous lessons we can learn from Joshua, and an extended personal study of the book will reap rich benefits, so become very familiar with this book. One of the clearest lessons is that fear is a main tool of the enemy and something we need to recognize and defeat by faith (1 John 5:4-5). Also knowing that each battle is different and God has no one way for victory is important. As always, the importance of perseverance is clear throughout. Depend on God alone for victory (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 8:28).

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: God equips us with the weapon we will need to win our battles. The sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is our offensive weapon (Matthew 4:4; Ephesians 6:17). Read, study, memorize and use God's Word. The more proficient you are in God's Word the more powerful you will be in battle.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: Another very important lesson to learn about warfare from the book of Joshua is that warfare never ends. God's principle was for the Jews to gradually win over the land, bit by bit (Exodus 22:27-30; Deuteronomy 7:21-22). While the last great battle was with the giants, there were always mop-up operations, pockets of resistance, and rebellion which would break out in various places. Were the Jews to conquer the whole land in Joshua's time they wouldn't have been able to settle and cultivate all of it, so some would return to a wild state. Instead, God let them

conquer some land and settle, then move ahead to conquer a little more. God wanted them to conquer and settle the land before moving ahead. We, too, are to learn and grow from each conflict we face. This also was how God taught them to fight: by continual practice. They were to teach their children who would continue the battles, and pass it on to their children.

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: Fortunately, though, the warfare isn't continual. It comes in cycles. The Jews had times of intense warfare, then times of consolidating and applying their gains. There wasn't constant battle every minute of every day. God interspersed times of rest, times to grow and mature and times to solidify what was won in the previous battle before they had to move ahead again. God does that today as well. We have times of great stretching and challenge, then times of peace and rest during which we gather our strength and apply what we have learned. Then another battle comes. Don't expect the battles to ever end, but don't become discouraged thinking the current battle will last forever. Battles come and go in cycles. We grow spiritually in spurts just as plants, animals and even a child's body grows in spurts.

These are 5 very important lessons about spiritual warfare. Which have you already learned? Which do you need for your current battles?

BLOG 552: IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT US (Joshua 5)

Joshua concludes his book with a heartfelt plea to the Jews, asking them to turn from their foreign gods and serve the Lord only (**Joshua 24:14-15**). The worship of the Canaanite gods was very demonic. Baal, for example, was the number one god. His name means lord, master or owner. He was the god of weather and fertility and his worship was grossly immoral and extremely bloody. The highest-ranking goddess was his mate, Ashtoreth (Judges 2:13; 3:7) She is also involved with fertility. Her name has been corrupted to 'Easter' and her fertility worship included rabbits, eggs and focus on the spring solstice. God decreed the death penalty on those who served these gods because of their evil, immoral, demon-inspired worship.

LESSON FOR TODAY: The battle for Palestine was not just between the Jews and Canaanites. It was really between God and Satan, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The gods of the Canaanites were very evil and demonic and involved in many sexually immoral activities. There were literally thousands of them. Elaborate rites of exorcism were developed by the priests to protect the people from the hordes of demonic spirits which attacked the people with distress and disease. There was much fear involved in these animistic beliefs. These fleshly, sensual forms of worship appealed to the Jews so God was very strict about forbidding His people to have anything to do with them, to destroy them and their possessions, and to stay separated from them (Joshua 24:14-15).

For the next thousand years this battle will continue. Satan will use these false religions to tempt and mislead God's people, turning them from the One true God and putting them under His judgment. When they worshipped these false idols, they were really worshipping and giving power to the demons behind them (1 Corinthians 10:20). Eventually the Jews will be removed from their land because of this sin, so this plan of Satan's will ultimately succeed.

The battle between God's forces and Satan's forced is fought in heaven, but its reverberations are felt by us on earth. Daniel is a good example of this (Daniel 10:1-14). God sent an angel to answer his prayer but territorial spirits controlling the land where he was praying interrupted the angels and a 3-week long battle ensued until the angel could get through with God's message for Daniel.

Thus, we see that the conflicts between God's people and those who represent the enemy are more than just human clashes; they mirror the warfare going on in the heavenlies between God and Satan. It's not all about us, it's something much bigger than us!

Take a moment to think about the battles you are currently facing. What difference does it make to see your struggles as a reflection of the battles between God and Satan in the heavenlies? How can that motivate you to persevere and not give up?

BLOG 553: STAGES OF DEMONIZING

Saul was the first king over Israel. He was the choice of the people for he was tall and good looking (**1 Samuel 10:23-24**) – external traits being all the Jews cared about. He didn't follow God nor did he lead the people to victory in their battles. Pride and insecurity turned him from a shy, humble man to a self-centered tyrant. His insecurity and fear opened him up to demonic oppression.

Stage 1 Demonizing. The first stage of his demonic oppression was mild. When he was tormented David's music brought relief (1 Samuel 16:14-23). He opened himself to the influence of demons by his sin. When he allowed his fear to manifest itself in anger and rage, demons fed on his hate and injected more fear and anger into him (1 Samuel 18:10-22; 19:9-10; 20:30-33). He only found relief when David played and sang to him.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: God assigns angels to protect us, and He does it in an organized way, not haphazardly. So, too, Satan is methodical in assigning demons to attack us as well. Certain ones are assigned to focus on defeating us, perhaps also to other family members as well. They get to know us and our weaknesses so that they are better able to find chinks in our armor and attack us either head on or in new subtle ways, which often are more successful. They have had thousands of years of experience doing this so we are no match for them. God alone knows us better than they do and only He can help us have victory.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Sin opens the door to demons. Sinful desire is like a prayer, a request which demons are more than willing to fill. It brings our thoughts to life. Anger especially leads to demonizing (Ephesians 4:26-27; Matthew 18:34; II Corinthians 2:10-11). We voluntarily lose self-control and the anger becomes like a prayer, a seeking for something ungodly to empower us. Confess any anger as sin and take back any access you have given to Satan through it.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Christian music is a good way to have victory over demonic oppression today as well (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Not only does it reset our mind and thoughts with God's truth, but demons hate hearing Jesus praised and avoid places where that is happening. Playing music that lifts up Jesus when you are attacked is a good way to help win the battle. It is also a profitable practice at night for those who have thoughts and dreams that aren't from God. Letting Christian music play quietly in your room can help with that. If a certain part of your home or property seems to be especially under attack leave some music playing there all day and night. Leaving a light on can have the same affect for demons love darkness and hate the light.

Stage 2 Demonizing. The second stage then followed. Saul became more violent, even trying to kill David while he played music (1 Samuel 18:10-11; 19:7-17; 20:30-33). This shows how demons hate music that praises God and will do anything to silence it if possible. As the demons gather more control over Saul by his continual sin they are able to incite him to seek to kill David. Those in this stage start acting out in their sin area – in violence, greed, lust or whatever area they have opened in their life.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: Violence and rage are common effects of demonic presence. That is not to say that Saul, or anyone who has rages, is not responsible for their actions - they are. But at this point it takes more than just "trying harder" to have victory; it takes confessing the sin and

rebuking the work of the demons in your life. Then ask God to fill that void. The battle will then begin for they will seek to retake the property in your life they have gained. Using God's word by quoting His promises is the only way to have sustained victory.

Stage 3 Demonizing. The third and final stage of demonizing is then evident in Saul's life. Deeply destructive and totally ungodly behavior begins as Saul goes to a witch at Endor for advice (1 Samuel 28:8-15). Despite the fact that he knows God forbids this (Deuteronomy 18:9-13) he wants the witch to call up the spirit of Samuel so he can find out information about the future. Assuming a demonic manifestation would appear counterfeiting Samuel, they were both shocked when God allowed Samuel himself to manifest to them. Samuel foretold his future as he wanted, but it was one of death for disobedience.

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: While God has a plan for our lives that includes life, joy and peace, Satan also has a plan but it includes misery, destruction and death. He can only do what God allows. If he had his own way all Christians would be cruelly killed. He can only do what God allows (Job). Demons seem to bring that which is good for us, but like Satan's deception in Eden it is really for our destruction (John 8:44). Therefore, there can be no compromise in our warfare with Satan and his forces. We cannot give one inch of ground but must tirelessly battle for total freedom.

Can you think of examples of each of these stages you may have seen? What can you do to help someone in stage 1? What about stage 2? Or stage 3?

BLOG 554: JESUS' FIRST BATTLE WITH DEMONS - 1

Jesus had proclaimed Himself as the Messiah ('Christ') for two years. Some responded but most turned away, following the lead of the religious rulers who completely rejected Jesus and His claims. He did miracles to authenticate His authority and to show His power. If He can heal a body then He can certainly heal a soul as well.

One day Jesus went to Capernaum (**Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37**), His new home and the home of several of His disciples. While teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath a demonized man cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24) Jesus commanded the demon to be quiet and leave the man, which he did after shaking the man and causing a loud shriek to be heard. Naturally, everyone was amazed and word of this soon spread throughout the whole area. With this event the battle between Satan and Jesus moved to a new level.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: The Greek word translated "demonizing" refers to one who is heavily impacted by demons. It is used 15 times in the New Testament. The term "demonizing" does not differentiate between possession (demons within) or influence (demons without). God doesn't make that clarification or distinction, and we shouldn't try to make it, either. We don't need to know the exact extent of demonizing, just that it is taking place. The cause is the same, as are the symptoms and so is the cure. In the spiritual realm there are no clear-cut divisions like we try to make (demons 'within' or 'without', etc.). There are, of course, degrees of demonizing depending on the person, the demons involved, the access, and other factors, but it isn't always possible or necessary to pinpoint what is 'without' and what is 'within'.

Other words the Bible uses for 'demonizing' are "entered in" (as when Satan entered into Judas - John 13:27) and "filled" (Acts 5:5 about Ananias and Saphira, the same word that is used of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit). The common denominator is that the person being demonized usually doesn't separate his own consciousness from the demonic influence. He assumes that the thoughts and feelings the demon feeds him are his own. A person always has a free will to turn to God for help, but when followed these demonic impulses bring one deeper and deeper into bondage. Perhaps

demonizing can be better understood by thinking of it as a kind of spiritual hypnotism from within. Hypnotism of any kind is something for God's people to avoid (Psalm 54:4-5; Joshua 1:8; Philippians 4:8).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Demons can impact believers as they do unbelievers. Note that the demonized man was not a pagan who worshipped Satan. He was a faithful Jew who regularly attended synagogue, someone familiar to the people there and whom no one previously had suspected of being demonized. Probably he wasn't aware that the struggles he had in life were caused by demons. This happened at other times as well (Mark 5:39). While we don't know this man's exact spiritual state, this still brings up the question of believers being demonized. While there is general agreement that unbelievers can be demonized, some don't believe that can happen to believers because believers belong to Jesus. That is true, but demonizing doesn't imply ownership, just influence.

As long as we are in this body, we still have a sin nature, a capacity to sin just the same as we did before salvation. Salvation creates a new spiritual nature within us. But the old capacity to sin still remains. It is in this area, this sin nature, this capacity to sin, that demons work. Salvation does not remove our capacity to sin (sin nature) but gives us a new nature so we don't have to sin but can live in obedience to God. Believers can still sin after salvation as they did before. It is in this area of our 'flesh' or sin nature that demons work. Our new nature is greater but doesn't take away our free will choice to still function in our sin nature. Paul's struggle as recorded in Romans 7 describes this well.

The Bible makes no distinction between believers and unbelievers as far as demonizing is concerned. In fact, the Bible refers to many believers who were demonized: Paul's thorn in the flesh was a demon (II Corinthians 12:7), King Saul was a believer (I Samuel 11:6) and was obviously demonized (I Samuel 16:14-23), David was motivated by Satan to take a census of the people (I Chronicles 21:1ff; II Samuel 24:1ff), Ananias and Saphira were believers (Acts 4:32-35) but allowed Satan to "fill" them (Acts 5:3), and Peter was Satan's spokesman in tempting Jesus to not go to the cross (Matthew 16:23). Paul warns believers to not give Satan a "foothold" in their life (Ephesians 4:26-27), showing such a thing is possible. Jesus Himself called deliverance "the children's bread" (Matthew 15:22-28), meaning it was for His children. A Christian can receive another spirit (II Corinthians 11:2-4) and there are other examples of believers being demonized (Luke 13:10-16; I Corinthians 5:4-5). Christians are warned to guard against this (I Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:10-18).

A believer belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan cannot own him as he did before salvation (I John 4:4), but he can still influence him, "demonize" him. When the words 'possessed' or 'oppressed' are used, then the question is asked if a believer can be 'possessed.' To answer that then 'possessed' must be defined. The Bible simply does not define it, nor does it even talk about 'possession' – just 'demonizing' which means being influenced by a demon.

A Christian has every right and resource to be free from this demonizing, however. Property which you own can be trespassed on by another person, but you have every right and resource to put him off your property. You just need to learn how to do it. That's what spiritual warfare is all about.

Do you think you are immune from demonic attacks because you are a believer? Or that you don't have to battle as fiercely because God is on your side? Those are lies Satan would like you to believe. Rebuke the lies and press forward in faithfulness to Jesus.

BLOG 555: JESUS' FIRST BATTLE WITH DEMONS - 2

In our previous blog we started looking at Jesus' first conflict with a demonized person. It was a man in the synagogue where He was teaching (**Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37**). Let's look at some more lessons we can learn from that encounter.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: It is not coincidental that it was Jesus' presence and teaching that caused the demon to react (see also Mark 5:39). When Jesus is lifted up and His Word communicated, demons who are present will be affected for they can't stand to hear these things. Correct teaching of God's Word is essential for a church or individual to grow spiritually. Don't be surprised when it stirs up opposition against a person, family or church. Satan will do what he can to silence it, to keep the light from shining in his kingdom of darkness.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: How many demons were involved in this incident? "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!" Usually there is more than one demon involved when someone is demonized, there is a structured organization. Satan organizes his demons in the same manner God has angels organized - in a military-like structure. These are similar to generals, colonels, majors, lieutenants, sergeants, corporals, privates, etc. (Ephesians 6:12). Usually a "strong man" (or ruler) is assigned to a task, and he has lesser demons under his command to help in the work (Matthew 12:25-29; Daniel 10:2-6, 12-14). The names of these demons usually refer to their work ("Fear," "Anger," "Lust," "Pride," "Deception," etc.). In this case the ruling demon is the one speaking ("I") for the others who are part of the group working against this man ("us").

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: While the demon(s) in this man try to bait Jesus into communicating with them, He refuses to do so. Do not converse with demons, either by having them give messages to a person's mind or to speak verbally through a person's vocal cords. The object in deliverance is not to get in contact with demons but to remove them. It is not to get them to speak but to cause them to be silent! Communication with them makes you a medium and God's words forbids that (Deuteronomy 18:9-13).

There are good reasons God forbids communication with them. Neither Jesus (Mark 1:25) nor Paul would (Acts 16:17) encouraged them to speak. They are liars and deceivers (John 8:44) and you can't believe what they say. God wants you to be in touch with Him only (Deuteronomy 4:24). Through the Holy Spirit we have access to all truth and power (John 8:31-32; I Corinthians 12:7-11). By communicating with demons, you give them recognition, allow them to stall and deceive, give them the focus and attention they crave, make things much harder on all people involved, and open yourself up to pride. Communicating with demons can be a temptation to pride and we can find ourselves drawn into working by the power of our own flesh. We don't need any information they might give us, we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). The only time Jesus ever talked to a demon was for the purpose of showing those who were watching how many demons were involved and therefore how great His power was (Mark 5:9). Eve got into a dialogue with Satan and was deceived by him (Genesis 3:1-16 – for more about this see THE BATTLE BEGINS Genesis 3:8-15). If there is something you need to know, God will show it. Don't ever expect a demon to give information that will lead to his own defeat!

LESSON FOR TODAY 6: When the demons left this man they shook him and caused him to scream loudly. Sometimes demons will try to manifest in ways that are intended to bring fear to a person, but Jesus never allowed demonic manifestations to get out of hand and neither should we. In Jesus' name bind them, take away their power to resist, and command them to obey immediately and quietly when commanded in Jesus' name. We do not have to put up with their antics for they are only done to distract and to cause fear in us and recognition of their power. We know God is greater than they are (I John 4:4).

LESSON FOR TODAY 7: The first occasion of an act or event in the Bible often sets the prototype for others to come, and that is true of this first deliverance in the Caernaum synagogue. The exact methods used by Jesus to cast out spirits are mentioned in only five specific cases and in only one generalized case (which appears first on the following list):

Matt 8:16: "He cast out the spirits with a word."

Matt 15:28: "Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly."

Mark 1:25: "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!'"

Mark 5:8: "For He had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!'"

Mark 9:25: "He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again.'"

Luke 13:12-13: "He called her and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.' And he laid his hands upon her"

So generally speaking, it is true to say that Jesus cast out the spirits "**with a word.**" This refers to a short sentence or phrase according to the five examples given above, and not to some singular word. And what was that "phrase?" According to the above examples it was: "Be it done," "Come out (3 times)" and "You are freed." Jesus cast out spirits by a verbal command. In three of these cases, the command was, "Come out" (exertional ek), which is an adjuration. In the remaining case[s] it was, "Be it done," [and "You are freed,"] which are decrees of accomplishment. In two of these cases, He accompanied the verbal command with a verbal "rebuke." This rebuke was once stated as being, "Be silent." Hence, the commands used by Jesus contained variety, being tailored to fit the occasion or the subject. He used no rigid formula, no incantations, no rituals, no charms, etc. as did Hebrew exorcists. There are no special prayers, no 'magic' words or phrases to use or pray, no set way of "doing deliverance." Each situation is different, but all include the believer using Jesus' power and authority to stop the demons' work and to command them to be gone. Be sensitive to God's Spirit when dealing with such things and proceed as you feel Him leading you. Don't expect Him to lead the same as He does others, nor will He always lead you the same way. It's not our words or actions that bring deliverance, it's always and only His power. Just tap into it!

What can you learn from this first encounter Jesus had with a demonized person? How can it help you in your own battles?

BLOG 556: SYMPTOMS OF DEMONIZING 1 (Gadarenes Demoniac 1)

About six months after Jesus' first recorded deliverance, casting demons out of the man in the synagogue (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37), one of His major confrontations with demons occurred. He was about half way through His three-year public ministry. Unlike most of the other occasions, when the demonized person came to Jesus, this time He went to them. In was in the region of the Gadarenes. **Read Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34 or Luke 8:26-37.**

Jesus left the crowds He was ministering to in order to take a boat across the Sea of Galilee. He wanted to go help a man who couldn't come to Him. Satan didn't want Him to go free that man so he sent a storm to sink the boat. Jesus spoke to the storm and got safely to the other side.

When Jesus got there, He was met by a man with an evil spirit, actually many demons afflicted this man. Matthew 8:28 says there were two demonized men present, but Mark and Luke only refer to the one who was the spokesman. By looking at the lives these men were living we can see some of the **symptoms of demonizing.**

Symptom 1: **Darkness and death.** These men lived in a graveyard, probably in caves in the limestone cliffs by the lake. Dead bodies were placed in these caves to decay, so it was a very unnatural way to live (Mark 5:3, 5; Luke 8:29). God is light and life, but Satan and his demons are all about death and darkness. They are attracted to death and darkness, and bring death and darkness wherever they go.

Symptom 2: **Anger and violence.** Demons fuel violence and anger, and that characterized these men (Mark 5:3-4; Luke 8:29; Matthew 8:28). They attacked whomever came nearby. Demons love pain and destruction, and they enjoy using humans to bring suffering and misery to others. This can be physical, mental or emotional abuse of any form.

Symptom 3: **Out of control.** These men didn't have control of their actions (Mark 5:5). They would cry out and continually did evil. Demonizing takes control away from a person and motivates them to do what the demons want them to do.

LESSON FOR TODAY: Demons can never take 100% control of a person's free will, but over time they can build so much influence over a person that the person seems to be unable to resist. No matter what, no matter how strongly a person is controlled by demons, he or she still has a free will to reach out to Jesus. Demons can never take away their free will. That is the key to deliverance, especially for those who are greatly controlled. The demonized person MUST want to be free. If they don't, no one can force deliverance on them against their will. Pray not that they would be delivered, for God won't force their free will, but pray they would see the facts clearly and make a decision for God, however small it may seem. Deliverance is not done by the one ministering to the demonized, but by Jesus responding to the free will of the demonized person. Jesus chooses to use us as His vessel to bring this about, but it all depends on the will of the demonized.

Do you, or anyone in your family, have anger or rage issues? Do they have a relative who also has these issues? If so, it could be something demons are intensifying and making worse. Pray for wisdom and freedom from these things. Ask God to give you the self-control His Spirit provides (Galatians 5:22-23).

BLOG 557: SYMPTOMS OF DEMONIZING 2 (Gadarenes Demoniac 2)

Jesus' encounter with the demonized men in the Gadarenes graveyard give insight into what can happen when someone is influenced by demons. In the previous blog we saw that a draw to death and darkness or a problem with anger or self-control can be symptoms of demonic involvement. There are other symptoms we can see in **Read Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34 or Luke 8:26-37** as well.

Symptom 4: **Pain and self-destruction.** Another characteristic of demonic activity which is also unnatural is inflicting pain on themselves by cutting themselves (Mark 5:5). The only other time this is seen in the Bible is when the prophets of Baal slashed themselves so they bled in order to have Baal hear their cries and send fire to consume their altar (1 Kings 18:28). Both cases are clearly demonic.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Demons are behind self-destructive desires. It is unnatural for a person to want to harm themselves. Everything normal in us pushes for self-protection. When a person inflicts pain on themselves by cutting, tattoos (Leviticus 19:28) or taking their life we can be sure something has caused them to go against what is normal and natural, and usually that is demonic influence (Mark 9:20).

Suicidal thoughts should always be assumed to be motivated by demons (Matthew 17:14-19; Luke 9:37-45; Mark 9:14-29). This is also the case with Judas who was indwelt by Satan (Luke 22:3; John 13:27) and then committed suicide (Acts 1:18-19). If you or someone you know has these thoughts, pray against them. The person with the thoughts must confess them and take back any ground they have given to demons. These kinds of thoughts are like 'prayers.' All kinds and types of thoughts are like prayers. The difference in suicidal thoughts is that one dwells deeply in them and that gives them more power. Thoughts of hate, death, fear, lust, etc., also have power. The greater the thought given it the greater the power. The power is in the thought which empowers demons to help bring this about in a person's life. It is always with the person's free will choice never forced on them against their free will.

Symptom 5: **Ungodly sensuality and sexual perversion.** These men did not wear clothes (Luke 8:27). Their natural inhibitions and modesty were affected by the demons influencing them. Demons are often behind the sexual sins and perversion so common today.

Symptom 6: **Thoughts into their mind.** These sinful actions start with sinful thoughts. Demons are able to put a thought into a person's mind, then keep bringing it back again and again. It's not always a thought that the person wants, and certainly isn't a thought God would give them. Therefore, the only other source must be demonic. The thoughts lead to actions that bring bondage and destruction. They could be thoughts of anger, fear, violence, lust or greed. The thoughts could be sexual, self-destructive, vengeful or blasphemous. They can even be thoughts that cause a person to feel unforgiven or unloved by God, that a person has lost their salvation, or are too evil to ever be in heaven. Thoughts of fear, insecurity, unworthiness, failure, being alone, rejection and revenge are some of the many that demons strive to instill in a person's mind.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Not all evil thoughts are from demons, so how can we tell if our thoughts are from a demon or from our sin nature? When the source is our sin nature, we can have victory by confessing the sin and growing spiritually. It may take time, but there will be progress being made as we become more like Jesus. If the source is demonic then trying harder will have no lasting effect. These men in the graveyard were unable to change their own behavior because they had allowed the demons to have a powerful hold over them. They had given up control which only Jesus' power could get back for them.

Everyone experiences ungodly thoughts from time to time, but if you frequently get strong, almost overwhelming urges to harm yourself, commit sexual sins or have other evil thoughts, it could be part of a demon's plan to harass and defeat you. As soon as they come, immediately quote Scripture and praise God until they are gone. That's the cure – the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

BLOG 558: OPENING FOR DEMONIZING (Gadarenes Demoniac 3)

In the last 2 blogs we've looked at symptoms of demonizing from Jesus' encounter with the demonized men in Gadarenes. (**Read Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34 or Luke 8:26-37**) If you recall, those were pretty serious manifestations in their lives. What happened to allow the demon get such a strong hold on these men?

LESSON FOR TODAY: It is also natural to wonder how these men ever got to such a state. Why are some people so greatly demonized and others seemingly unaffected? The Bible doesn't tell us what allowed this in these men but does give us information as to the most common causes of demonizing. While any sin can open the door to allow demons in, there are some sins that are particularly effective in allowing this. Some of the more common openings to demonizing include:

Opening 1: **Sins that allow another power to control us.** If we turn to another power other than God, if we open our lives to influences that aren't from God, if we indulge in sins that allow us to be vulnerable to spiritual influences from demons, then we are opening the door for demons to enter and impact us. Idolatry, for example, opens the worshipper to demonizing because they allow the demon behind the idol to have access to themselves (1 Corinthians 10:20). Drug or alcohol abuse can do the same thing. Involvement in false religions also opens a door. Sexual sin is also a way demons enter a person's life (1 Corinthians 6:15-16). Pride, anger and fear also make us vulnerable, for they become a prayer for these things to grow in our lives, and only Satan's forces would answer such a prayer.

Opening 2: **Sin in our family line.** The sin that opened the door for demons to enter doesn't have to have been committed by us. It could have been committed by an ancestor of ours. When a

demon has access to a person, he also claims right to all that person has, including their children. The Bible says God "punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:8-9; Exodus 34:6-7). The Bible says that children are affected by their parents sins (Ezekiel 18;2) and this is one of the ways. Children are not accountable for them, but are impacted by their consequences. The same is true of positive, godly influences from our parents which also are passed on. This is often called "generational openings" or "ancestral openings" and is one of the most common reasons people are demonized. (For more information see under Old Testament, Moses (Exodus – Deuteronomy).)

Opening 3: **Where we live.** Some event may have happened on the land or in the home or room where you live. It could be a violent act, an occult activity, a curse, a dedicating of the property to the powers of darkness or similar acts. Sometimes when we go into a certain neighborhood or home there is a 'sense' of evil, a discomfort in our spirit. In a store that sells New Age materials you may 'feel' different in your spirit, a discomfort. This is the explanation for supernatural apparitions that happen in 'haunted' homes – demonic activity may be present. Some countries and even continents are in extra deep darkness and bondage. Often this can be sensed by mature, sensitive believers. The message we get is from God's Holy Spirit Who is warning us against the evil around us. Pray against it. Rebuke it. Leave unless you have a reason God wants you there.

If it is your home or church property then cleanse it. Pray, taking back any access the enemy may claim to the property and asserting your right as a child of God to claim and use it. Put any other claims under the blood of Jesus and dedicate it to Him for His honor and glory. A sign, picture or cross on the wall can be a good visual reminder to all of the ownership of the property by the Lord Jesus Christ.

If God wants you to do so, you can anoint the house and property while praying. Walk around your' boundaries praying out loud, claiming your property for God and forbidding any demons to have any access to it. Dedicate it to God and invite His presence throughout all of it. Take back any access any demons may claim to the property and put the access under the blood of Jesus. Break it in Jesus' name. Ask God to put an angelic hedge of protection around it. Do the same in all the rooms of the house, especially the basement (if you have one). Anoint each room with oil by dipping your finger in oil. Any kind will do, it is not the oil but the symbolism of God's Spirit being present that matters. With your finger then draw a cross on the door, walls, whatever seems appropriate. Pray as you would when you're walking around the property.

There is no power in the ritual or symbol, but in your heart attitude as you make a statement about whose side you are on. You are showing them you are ready to battle in God's strength. The cross announces to the spirit world whose side you are standing on and that you will battle rather than give in. The cross shows you are challenging their claim to that area.

If there is one particular part of the house that seems worse put a night light there so there is always light in to the room. You could do that to all the rooms. Demons turn from light because it shows truth and reality, which they don't want to see. They live in the realm of lies and deceptions. Demons hate light, and they hate hearing Jesus praised, so you can play praise music in various places 24 hours a day. It can be really soft – they will hear it! It's a constant reminder or Who is your Lord and Savior. It reminds them of the truth which counters their lies. Playing recordings of the Bible being read is even more powerful.

If any of the above seem to be opening the door to demons to attack you, take a few minutes now to pray and ask Jesus to block those points of access. Ask Him to remove any demonic activity in your life and replace it with the power and presence of His Holy Spirit. Then thank Him for it.

BLOG 559: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CURSES (Gadarenes Demoniac 4)

We've seen how sin in our lives or in our family line can be an opening for demons to attack us. Another opening we saw was through things that may have happened in the home or on the land where we live. A common reason, although many do not recognize it in their lives, is having been cursed by someone.

Opening 4: **Curses.** It may be someone has put a curse on you or your family by asking that something bad happen to you. That is really a prayer that Satan loves to answer! That desire empowers demons to try to carry out the person's desire. Parents can curse their children by saying they wish they hadn't had them, they hate them, don't want them, they are no good and will never amount to anything, and so forth. Finally, we can curse ourselves (Proverbs 6:2) by saying we hope we die, that we aren't good enough, that we'll never be happy, we'll fail in what we try or any of many such things about ourselves(Proverbs 6:2).

The area of curses is a less common but still a strong opening to demonic access. To curse someone is to ask for evil to happen to them. Those requests (really prayers) are heard by Satan and his forces and 'answered' when possible. Cursing thoughts are like prayers. The more a person thinks of them and focus on them, the more power will go to the curse, or the blessing, whichever the case. This includes everything from occult and witchcraft curses to one individual 'wishing' harm on another. Balaam was paid to curse Israel, but God wouldn't allow it (Deuteronomy23:4; Numbers 22 - 24). Curses can also be passed on from generation to generation. The Bible says that speaking evil of someone is the same as cursing them (Romans 12:14). Curses can be thinking or saying things like: "I hope you die..." "Since he/she won't love me I wish they'd" "You're no good, you'll never amount to anything..." "I hope she gets some of her own medicine..." "I hope your children" You can even curse yourself by what you say (Proverbs 6:2). Our words are powerful and important. They aren't something to be taken lightly. Using profanity ("curse" words) also falls into this category. When someone "damns" someone to "hell" that is an awful, awful thing to say! Demons love to hear it. They use the power of the hate in the speaker and will latch onto any authority or justification to do their evil!

It's not the verbal sounds that make the difference but our thoughts and feelings inside as we express them verbally. Rote chanting of words does nothing, but heartfelt desires communicated to God mean a lot. God reads our mind and thoughts even when we pray silently, but demons do not have access to our thoughts so praying or expressing ourselves out loud makes them aware of how we feel and where we stand. If it is inappropriate to pray out loud then do so in thoughts and let God take care of the rest, but when it is possible to express yourself out loud it is best to do so. It's important to realize that our thoughts are breathing and living and so are our feelings and, therefore, so is prayer.

The Bible says we can curse others (Ps 109:17). Demons use this as an excuse to work against the person, as a 'prayer' to gain access. Old Testament men (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. Gen 27:23, 38) would bless or curse their children (Genesis 48:20). Sometimes they even put a curse on them, as Abraham did with Ishmael and when Isaac cursed Esau. The Levites were used to pronounce blessings (Deuteronomy 10:8; 21:5). When Naomi came back to Israel she said she was to be called 'mara' because things had turned 'bitter' for her. A father is to bless his children by his words and send them into life with his and God's blessing. What you have done is the opposite.

If you feel this may have happened to you remember to "Bless them that curse you" (Matthew 5:44). Treat the person with love and kindness, for when you return good for evil the "undeserved curse does not come to rest" (Proverbs 6:2). Break that curse against you in Jesus' name, claiming Galatians 3:10,13 which says "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is

written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Ask God to turn the curse to a blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5).

Good is stronger than bad, so when you speak good into a situation where previously bad was spoken then the good is stronger and purer and it stops the curse. You can throw it back at the person who threw it at you, but turn it into a blessing – bless those who curse you (Luke 6:28). Love the person who hates you and God will use that stronger love to overcome the hate (Luke 6:27).

LESSON FOR TODAY: Curses can and must be broken in Jesus' name for the truth is that they can't prosper against God's people (Isaiah 54:17). 1) Break any and all of them in Jesus' name (Galatians 3:13) and 2) ask God to surround you and protect you with His presence and angels instead (Job 1:5).

Let's go back to our account of Jesus with the demonized men in the Gadarenes. When Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee and landed, they immediately came to Him and knelt before Him (Mark 5:1-8). The demons recognized He was God. Perhaps the men did as well, or somehow sensed something different about Him. Despite the terrible control the demons had, they still have free will to choose to come to Jesus or not.

This whole topic of curses might be new to you. Ask God to show you if it applies to you, and if it does then how it applies. It may be something affecting a friend or other family member. Pray for wisdom and guidance, and boldly pray to break (in Jesus' name of course) any curse you may suspect on yourself or another.

BLOG 560: DEMONS ALWAYS YIELD TO JESUS (Gadarenes Demoniac 5)

So far in these blogs about Jesus and the demonized men in Gadarenes, we've seen symptoms and causes of demonizing. Now comes the good part – when Jesus drives out the demons and frees the men from bondage.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: The demons could not prevent these men from coming to Jesus. No matter how many demons or how strong the influence, God always makes sure the person still can make a free will choice to move away from the demons and towards God should they choose to do so. No one is helpless, locked in – not unless they choose for it to be that way. (See Symptom 3. Out of Control. above for more information about a demonized person's free will).

This is the only time Jesus ever talked to a demon. He asked him his name, which was 'Legion' meaning about 5,000 or 6,000 soldiers, signifying the number of demons influencing this man. Jesus wanted everyone to see how great His power was by how many demons He could defeat at one time. The only other thing they said was a request to go into the pigs. Jesus had commanded them to leave and, while they stalled as long as they could, they knew they couldn't resist His command.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Jesus had to command the demons to come out over and over (Mark 5:8, continual present tense in the Greek, "kept saying over and over"). They were very resistant to leaving, even when Jesus commanded them. This is the only time that happened for every other time they left immediately (Matthew 8:16). Some demons have such a strong hold on their host that it takes persistent warfare to remove them (Mark 9:29).

As stated, the demons made an unusual request – to indwell the pigs which were nearby since they could no longer indwell the men. Jesus allowed this, again probably to show those watching the power and destruction of the demons He had so easily defeated.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Demons want to indwell something, if they lose their host they will immediately seek another. Often, they share several hosts at one time, moving from one person to another. That's why demonic oppression often seems to go in cycles.

If demons can't indwell people, they will indwell animals. Perhaps this is why sometimes whales, the animals with the greatest intelligence and the closest to humans in many ways, beach themselves. I've often wondered if what happened to these pigs doesn't still happen sometimes today. That could be an explanation of why these great sea creatures sometimes beach and kill themselves. This shows that demons seek to bring death and destruction, and self-destructive tendencies come from demonic influence. Why else would pigs suddenly commit suicide?

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: The demons didn't want to be sent "out of the area" (Mark 5:10). This was the territory they were assigned to and they didn't want to leave it. It was their 'home' area. Demons are assigned to different geographical locations, families, groups, world movements, religious or secular groups, etc. They stay with them for generations and want to continue working in those areas. They become very good at what they do.

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: Neither did they want to be sent "into the abyss" (Luke 8:31). The Greek word, 'tartarus,' is used as a place of confinement for demons who are awaiting their expulsion into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:1-3). They didn't want to go there because they would then be inactive and not able to cause harm to God's kingdom.

LESSON FOR TODAY 6: The demons knew they would one day be tormented, but it was not time for that yet (Matthew 8:29). They fear the coming judgment. We can have courage and confidence that they fear us when we are ministering in Jesus' power.

The end of the story has a happy ending: "When they came to Jesus they saw the man who had been demonized by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). Today we talk about chemical imbalances, emotional disorders and bipolar tendencies. We prescribe various kinds of medicines. When Jesus faced people with these symptoms, He cast out the demons and immediately they were total freed and completely normal and mentally healthy

LESSON FOR TODAY 7: When Jesus cast demons out of someone or forgave them He, in some manner or way, told them to not sin any more (John 8:11). It was sin that led to the bondage and demonizing in the first place. The sin must be confessed (admitted to as sin, I John 1:9) in order for the demons to no longer be able to claim it and stay.

LESSON FOR TODAY 8: Here is a prayer you can use if you sense any demonic activity against yourself. You can change the words and use them for others. It is only an example. There is no one right way to pray or say things. Adapt and use this however you would like:

"Dear Jesus, I thank you for the salvation you give me in Jesus. I know You are greater than Satan and His demons. I know You have power and authority over them. I know You have given us that power & authority in Jesus' name. In Jesus name I forbid any demons to work against me or my family or my church. In Jesus name I close the door to any reason they think they can work against me. If I have committed any sin that they use to work against me I put it under the blood of Jesus. In Jesus' name I forbid them to work and command them to be gone. In Jesus' name I break any claim that comes down through my family line. I am a new creation in God's family. I forbid any claim against me through my name or family line. In Jesus' name I dedicate the land where my home and church are to God. In Jesus' name I break any claim demons may make through those places. I ask for Your presence only to fill and use those places. In Jesus' name I break any curses any one has made against me, my family or my church. Jesus has taken all my curse on the cross. His power has broken any power of the enemy against me. So, in Jesus' name I forbid any demons to work against me or

my family or my church. I commit myself and my family and my church to God only. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Surround me with Your angels. Use me for Your glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen"

Meditate for a few moments as you think back over what you learned from this encounter in Gadarenes. Thank God for His truth and the freedom you have gained through applying it. Ask Him to continue to teach and apply His truths from this event to your life. Thank Him for His faithfulness in doing so.

BLOG 561: LAYING ON OF HANDS IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

A few months afterwards Jesus' victory over the demons in the men at Gadarenes, 3 full years after Jesus left the carpentry shop in Nazareth and was baptized by John, a final example of Jesus' power over Satan is recorded (**Luke 13:10-17**). Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath and a **woman who had been crippled by a demon for 18 years** was present. When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, put His hands on her, and immediately she was healed. The religious rulers objected to Jesus doing this on the Sabbath and Jesus rebuked them as hypocrites. Talking about the woman, Jesus referred to her being crippled as Satan binding her (Luke 13:16).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Sometimes God may lead you to lay hands on the person you are praying for, and on occasion Jesus Himself did this (Luke 4:29; 13:11-23; Matthew 8:15) as did the early church (I Corinthians 1:14f; 12:4; II Corinthians 1:21f; James 5:13-16). Touch can be a way of bestowing God's power and presence from you to the person you are praying for. It can help God's power break down the demons' defenses. It is a way of identifying with the person and connecting to them. Demons hate being touched, so laying hands on a person helps break their resistance as well. Be sensitive to God's leading in this area and do whatever it is He leads you to do.

When a person is demonized, they experience sound, touch, etc. through the host person. Making the person look at you forces them to be aware of the truth you are speaking and not able to hide from it. Touching the person also gets their attention and focus so they are recipients of the truths you are speaking and they can't hide behind their lies and deceptions. Physically touching someone who is demonized often brings physical pain to the demon which gets their attention and reminds them of whose power is greater. So have the person sit or stand up straight and look at you when you speak so the demons can't hide and avoid your commands.

When a person allows someone to lay hands on them, they in effect submit themselves to the authority of that person. If that person, the one in the position of authority, is open to something demonic then that can pass onto the person on whom hands are laid.

Make sure there is no sin in your life when you lay hands on someone, for when you stir up demonic opposition their first target will be you. Make sure you are walking closely with the Lord. Make sure that every sin is put under the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9). To engage in this form of spiritual warfare is similar to taking the Lord's Supper with sin in your life for you are opening yourself up to demonic activity or God's discipline (or both).

By the same token, people who have had someone who wasn't a believer living in obedience to God lay hands on them have had a demon transferred to them by this. A casual touch will not do this, but submitting to the authority of someone else by bowing your head and letting them put hands on you opens you to them and their power, and therefore any demons that may have access to them. If this has happened this must be confessed and any demons who claim that as access to the person commanded to be gone.

A physical touch can be powerful. Even if you don't lay hands on someone in prayer, you can connect with them by physically touching them when talking to them, especially when you want to encourage them. Look for appropriate opportunities to touch others, especially those of the same sex. Holding hands with someone you are praying with or for is good, too. Look for opportunities today.

BLOG 562: DELIVERANCE AND HEALING

There is often a strong relationship between spiritual deliverance and physical healing. Often physical problems are also gone when the demons leave. That is because it was the demons who were causing the physical problems. Examples of these in the Bible include: crippled limbs (Luke 13:11), Paul's thorn in the flesh (eye disease? - II Corinthians 12:7), muteness (sometimes dumbness, too - Matthew 9:32-33; 12:22; Mark 9:17-18,24-25), blindness (Matthew 12:22), seizures (Mark 1:26; 9:17-18,20,22,25; Matthew 17:15,18; Luke 9:39), deafness (Mark 9:17-18,20,25), sores (skin cancer?) (Job 2:7), boils and other painful afflictions (Psalm 78:49 - the plagues in Egypt were demon-caused), and physical torments of all kinds (Revelation 9:5,10). The Bible states that Satan can cause illness (Job 2:7-8), even death (Job 1:19).

Physical healing can be a result of deliverance. If any of the demons who were removed were causing physical problems those problems will be resolved when the demons are removed. Generational spirits can cause the same ailments from generation to generation. Physical problems are usually not God's main concern, rather He is more concerned for the spiritual condition of the heart. We often pray for the symptom (physical problem) to be removed while God wants us to seek Him and what He is trying to teach us through it. Paul's thorn in the flesh is a clear example. It wasn't God's will for that demon to be removed, but for Paul to be spiritually strengthened through the experience.

If a physical problem is present it is helpful to find out when it first started and what else was going on at that time. Instead of focusing on removing the physical symptom, look for the root cause, be it demonic, spiritual or whatever else it may be.

Jesus often cast out demons and cured illness at the same time. Jesus said he would do this (Luke 13:32). He did this at the start of His ministry (Matthew 4:23-24; 8:16; Mark 1:34; Luke 4:41), around Tyre and Sidon (Mark 3:10-12; Luke 6:18-19), and in the middle of His ministry (Luke 7:21). Many female followers of Jesus were cured of both (Luke 8:2).

Even more precise are the accounts of when Jesus both cast out demons and healed illness in a person at the same time (Mark 6:13; Acts 5:16). Philip did this in Samaria (Acts 8:7) and Paul did it in Ephesus (Acts 19:12).

It must be noted that not all illness is demonic in origin. Jesus healed physical ills that weren't demonic (Matthew 4:23-24; 8:16-17 fulfilled Isaiah 53:4; Mark 1:34; Acts 10:34; etc.). The Bible clearly talks about illnesses that are not demonic: severe pain (Matthew 4:24), seizures (Matthew 4:24), paralysis (Matthew 4:24; Acts 8:7), leprosy (Matthew 10:8), blindness (Luke 7:21), crippled limbs (Acts 8:7) and many other various diseases (Matthew 4:24). The fact that some physical ailments are on both lists (like seizures) shows that many ailments may have demonic or natural causes. They could be from one source or the other.

Thus, it is obvious that some, but not all illness is demonic. There are no certain illness' that are exclusively demonic, nor others that aren't. Any physical ill can be demonic, but it doesn't seem that any one physical illness is always demonic. In our day and age, we err by seeing too few illnesses as being demonic. However, we often miss the cure. How can we tell if an illness or physical problem is demonic or not? Some clues to look for are: medical doctors aren't able to bring relief or cure; there is a pattern of it running in the family; it seems strange or doesn't follow the regular pattern of symptoms (comes and goes for no particular reason, etc.); or you feel in your spirit that it should be prayed about and looked into as possibly being demonic.

Again, our pattern for bringing about this removal of physical ills by deliverance should follow Jesus' example. He rebuked a fever and it left immediately and strength instantly returned (Luke 4:39).

On at least one occasion power came from within Jesus to heal (Luke 6:19). He often laid hands on a person to bring both deliverance and healing (Luke 4:40; 13:13; 4:29; Matthew 8:15; Luke 13:1-13).

As to us doing this today, again it must be done in God's strength and power. If He chooses to bring healing through deliverance that is His will. We must never demand it or make it dependent on having enough faith. No one today has a gift to heal anyone and everyone. It is right for us to pray for healing when doing deliverance and leave the results to God. It is also necessary to deal with any demons who may be causing the illness (physical or mental). Often demons affect our health in indirect ways, such as working in us so we eat or do things that are unhealthy for us in the long run and undermine our health. All of these, too, must be dealt with in Jesus' name (Matthew 10:1). Sometimes God may lead you to anoint with oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit who does the healing (Mark 6:13). Do NOT put any faith in the oil or any ritual in using it, it is simply an audio-visual. For more on healing see under 13. LAYING ON OF HANDS (Luke 13:10-17).

In conclusion, be aware that illness is often demonic, especially when doctors are unable to bring a cure. Even diseases they can cure can still be demonic, especially if there are other signs of demonizing active in the person's life. Keep this in mind when praying and seeking wisdom. Don't accept any illness as "incurable." Always make sure it isn't demonic (by asking God for wisdom and commanding any demons involved in that ailment to be gone in Jesus' name). Remember, when dealing with emotional and spiritual ills in your warfare praying, don't let out physical ills! Never fear, demons can only cause illness with God's approval (Job 1:6-12).

One word of warning: since demons can cause illness, they can also bring counterfeit 'healings' by stopping the physical ills they themselves cause (Matthew 12:24; 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 16:14). This explains miraculous healings that aren't done in accordance with God's will and Word.

Are you, or someone you know, struggling with a long-time illness that doctors don't seem to be able to cure? Ask God to show you if it could be related to demonic activity in the person's life. Help them to see their need for deliverance and guide them through it. Many times, healing does come when the demon causing it are gone.

BLOG 563: IS IT GOD'S WILL FOR EVERYONE TO BE HEALED TODAY?

There are those today who believe that Jesus not only paid for sin on the cross, but that He also paid for our sickness. They say that each is received by faith, if you have enough faith to receive it. Loss of faith, then, causes the loss of these benefits of faith. They claim some are especially gifted in healing and can heal those who come to them. They say God did miracles in the Bible and he is still a miracle-working God today.

What about this? Is this true? This is not just one peripheral issue, but stands very central in our salvation and Christian life. Is God's sovereignty or man's free will the final and ultimate deciding factor? It must be God's sovereignty. The motive for living for Jesus should not be fear of losing our salvation. The goal of living for Jesus should not be a problem free life. Pain and suffering aren't to be faced by whipping up enough 'faith' so that God removes it (or living with the feelings of failure and guilt if it isn't removed and we believe that is our fault by not having enough faith). What about these claims of 'faith healers'? What does the Bible say?

Is the gift of healing for today? While it's true that Jesus and the Apostles healed, it was done as a sign to authenticate that they were from God (Matthew 12:39). This was God's way of having people listen to them instead of all the counterfeits around. When they were fully authenticated, there was no longer any reason for the sign. In AD 35 all were healed but by AD 60 some were not (Epaphroditus, Paul's thorn in the flesh). Then by AD 67 very few were being healed (Trophimus was

left at Miletus sick, Timothy's stomach was unhealed, etc.). Jerusalem, the scene of many early miracles, had not one miracle done in it after Stephen was stoned. The people had the evidence but rejected it. James, the oldest book in the Bible, says that if someone is sick we are to pray for them (James 5:14).

Should we see miracles today like in bible times? Actually, if you list all the miracles in the Bible you will find almost all of them fit three time periods. They aren't evenly spread out throughout history but cluster in the times of Moses/Joshua, Elijah/Elisha and Jesus/apostles. In each of these times a new mess had developed so God sent a new message through a new messenger whom He authenticated by miracles ("signs"). One more time of miracles is coming, called the Tribulation.

Is faith a prerequisite for healing? Jesus didn't make faith a requirement for healing. Many that He healed didn't have faith. The impotent man at the pool didn't even know who He was. The man with the withered hand and the man with dropsy were healed as a sign to religious leaders who were present, they didn't ask to be healed. The cripple that Peter and Paul healed outside the temple didn't exercise any faith. Of course, the demoniacs who were delivered and those brought back from the dead didn't exercise faith. Then there are others who had strong faith but weren't healed: Stephen, Paul, Timothy, Job, David, Elisha, etc.

Is 'healing' today the same as in bible times? Today's 'healers' must meet the same characteristics of Jesus and the apostles to claim they are doing what was done then. Jesus and the apostles healed with a word or touch wherever and whenever. There was no special place or time, no chants or music, no gimmicks, nothing. Do today's faith healers walk down the hall in a hospital and empty every room? That's how Jesus and Peter did it. Also, Bible miracles were done instantly, not gradually or slowly. There was no healing to 'claim' or lose. Healing was then done totally, not partially, and it was never lost. Everyone was healed. There was no screening done. 100% of every one, no matter the need, was healed. Organic diseases were healed: limbs grew back instantly, strong enough to walk on, eyes were open, leprosy instantly gone and healthy flesh grown. Then, too, the dead were raised. Today's faith healing doesn't nearly meet these characteristics.

Does God not heal? Yes, a sovereign God can always heal. He is always able to heal, but He is not always willing. Healing isn't guaranteed. Healing isn't based on our having enough faith. Miracles by Jesus and the apostles were done as a sign to authenticate the One who could heal an unseen soul. God can and does heal, but He doesn't gift others to do it, nor does He say that is the recommended norm for His people.

What are we to do when sick? When we are sick it's good to first make sure it isn't for sin or disobedience. If there is sin that God is using the sickness to point out, confess it and God will forgive and then use that illness for good (Romans 8:28). It's fine to pray, asking God to heal if that is His will. We are to submit to His will; not demand He do what we want. Ask Him to use the pain and suffering for His glory (that we and others can see His greatness through His provision and peace) and our growth (make us trust Him more and become more like Jesus). Use the best available resources: diet, rest, exercise and medical help. Realize that all healing does ultimately come from God. Leave the results to His will, though.

Granted, this whole subject of faith and healing can be a confusing and guilt-producing area. Specific verses can be found to seemingly support most any view. However, an overview of the Bible and it's teaching about these things definitely seems to substantiate the above view of healing. Always remember, our faith must be in Jesus. HE is the object of our faith, never a human person or group. Put faith in Jesus, not faith in your faith! HE is the one we are to look to and glorify. Always keep your eyes on Him. Trust and serve Him no matter what.

Thank God for all the times He has healed you in the past, and from all the illness' He has kept you from getting in the first place. Thank Him for His power over illness and for the health He has given you.

BLOG 564: ANGER & UNFORGIVENESS: OPEN DOORS FOR SATAN (2 Corinthians - 1)

The early church faced many difficulties as it spread. Attacks from without were repelled by turning to Jesus for guidance and power. It was the attacks within the church that were, and still are, the most effective for Satan. The church in **Corinth** had more than its share of troubles, mostly brought on by their own sin and disobedience. Demons can use those sins as openings to come in and magnify the damage among believers. Paul wrote letters to the Corinthians to them to warn and educate them about these things. The warnings and teachings apply to us today as well.

In 2 Corinthians he warned the believers to **be aware of Satan's schemes** so they aren't tricked and defeated (2 Corinthians 2:11). The brother who was living with his father's wife and was disciplined by exclusion from church fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) evidently repented and was restored to fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:5-6). Now Paul encourages them to forgive the man and treat him with love and acceptance (2 Corinthians 2:7-10). If they don't forgive him, Paul says, Satan will use that to work against them (2 Corinthians 2:11).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Paul is warning them that Satan will use their unforgiveness as an opening to attack them. One of the leading causes of demonizing is unconfessed anger. Anger includes any form of unforgiveness, bitterness, hate, jealousy, gossip, criticism, etc. Paul says these can "give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27). He tells the Corinthians that if they don't forgive each other Satan will use that to "outwit" them (II Corinthians 2:10-11). Jesus Himself said that those who don't forgive others will be turned over to tormenting demons to bring them to repentance (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:34). This anger includes anger toward others, parents, self, or God. There can be no removing demons who claim this access until all anger is truly confessed and put under the blood of Jesus. This is one of the first things that usually comes up when we counsel people and pray for their deliverance. Do NOT take this lightly! Don't rush through this step. Spending time praying for God to show anger and unforgiveness is time well spent.

Many verses warn about the danger of unconfessed unrighteous anger and how demons can use it to gain access to the angry person (2 Corinthians 2:10-11). "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Anger comes from mishandling hurt and pain. Instead of feeling the hurt we turn it into anger for revenge or control. This allows demons to use it as an opening. There is a lack of control that opens the door. Also, it is almost like a prayer for power to hate someone, and demons seek to answer that prayer. They made Saul angry at David, so much so that he tried to kill David (I Samuel 18:10-11; 19:9-10). Paul says there is a very close connection between anger and demonizing (Ephesians 4:27).

Pain must be handled as pain, not turned into anger. You can't bury something alive and think you are getting rid of it. The hurt must be dead - faced, admitted, healed, removed, forgiven. When a person buries hurt alive it keeps poisoning everything until it is dug out and destroyed.

While there is a legitimate use for anger ('righteous indignation') most of what we face is not right. Anger is a secondary emotion, unlike fear which is a basic emotion. Wrong anger is always the result of mishandling another, deeper emotion like fear or pain. Let's take pain, first of all. When a person hits their finger with a hammer what do they do? Usually, they get angry. What they feel is pain, but it comes out as anger because anger is a much easier emotion to handle than pain. When

someone says something critical or threatening it hurts, but the natural response in many is to get angry. That way they don't have to face the pain – but it stays and causes more and more anger. That's where fear comes in. It's not just pain that causes anger, but fear of pain. Fear is at the root of anger in other ways as well. To seek to manage our fears we try to control our lives and circumstances (thus the control emphasis part grows). We feel that is necessary to prevent pain and other things we fear. We use anger as a control tool. The adrenaline rush makes us feel in charge instead of a victim. We learn that people can be manipulated and controlled by our anger (or the threat of it) and we use that to control as well. This is another reason why it's important to deal with and get victory over the fears down inside. When they go the anger and control issues will become much more manageable. A person can't stop their anger as long as what causes it is still inside pushing it out. They must get the root cause out, and that is where dealing with the fear comes in.

Do you or someone you know struggle with anger? What have you learned from this blog that can help bring victory? Write down the main lessons that apply to you so you don't forget them.

BLOG 565: IGNORANCE IS DANGEROUS (2 Corinthians - 2)

One of the reasons sin and Satan were so rampant in the church in **Corinth** is because they were spiritually immature (**1 Corinthians 3:2**). He works best today where the Bible is not taught and people aren't growing in their faith.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Satan blinds believers to the reality of his persona and work. Many believers today are ignorant of spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Some even deny Satan exists, or, if they do believe he is real, think that believers are immune from his attacks. Nothing could be further from the truth. We must be soldiers who know how to use the equipment our commander provides in order to defeat those who would destroy us. Ignorance of how Satan works plays into his hands and leads to sure misery. Learn spiritual warfare, teach it to others, and use it whenever necessary.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Satan is really fighting a battle on three levels. There is the cosmic battle, Satan and demons battle against God and angels in the heavenlies (Daniel 10:1-14), the battle against believers on this earth (Ephesians 6:10-12) and an entirely different war against unbelievers to keep them in his kingdom and use them for its advancement (Acts 26:18). Our battle against him in this life is really just a faint reflection of the real battle which takes place in the heavenlies. Although fiction, Frank Peretti's books "This Present Darkness" and "Overcoming the Darkness" help show us what these conflicts may look like. As you battle, remember the angels are battling with you and for you, you are not alone, you are just part of the greater cosmic conflict for control of the universe, and you are on the winning side! Never give in!

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: If you are a believer then you have left Satan's kingdom of darkness (Ephesians 2:1-10) and deserted his army, choosing instead to join the forces of his arch rival. If you think he will take that lightly and leave you alone, that he will do nothing to retaliate and render you ineffective for God, then you are greatly mistaken (Daniel 10:10-21; Acts 13:6-12; 16:16-24; 19:11-18). He is totally committed to your destruction (Ephesians 6:10-18). That is why it is imperative to learn to fight. In addition, we still fight our old sin nature (Romans 7:14-25), so in reality we are fighting a battle on two fronts. Often, they combine and make things that much harder on us!

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: Satan has already been defeated at the cross (Hebrews 2:14-15; Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 4:8). In the future he will be crushed and removed forever (Revelation 20:1-3, 10). Now, in the present, we have authority and power over him in Jesus' name (John 14:12; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 9:1, 10:1, 17-19; Acts 1:8). God uses us to gain victory over Satan even today. His future fall and removal are sure. It's just a matter of time.

Satan will be defeated by God's people. Paul reminds struggling believers that, although it may seem like Satan is winning at the moment, it won't always be that way. "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20).

God shows demons His greatness through us. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 3:10). "Rulers and authorities" refer to the breakdown of Satan's organization of demonic forces (see below under Ephesians 6:10).

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: ALL powers are under God's authority (Ephesians 1:22), but not yet brought under His final control (Ephesians 6:12). God allows them freedom as He respects mankind's free will. He allows man the choice to follow Satan or not. We are living and building God's Kingdom of light in the middle of Satan's kingdom of darkness. Therefore, they can clearly see what we are doing – they carefully watch so they can destroy our work. But by our lives, our faithfulness and Christlikeness, we proclaim God's power and greatness. Our victory over their work reminds them of their ultimate final defeat and demise. Many, however, are ignorant of this fact, so by our small victories over them now, we show them of God's sovereign control and final defeat of them. Satan, the great deceiver, has deceived many of his own demons about their final defeat. Thus, by our lives, and our words, we proclaim God's victory over them.

Thank God for His power and victory in your life, for all He has done for you, and all He has protected you from of which you weren't even aware. Spend some time praising Him for all you have because of Him.

BLOG 566: CAN UNBELIEVERS USE SPIRITUAL WARFARE? (2 Corinthians - 3)

The immature believers at **Corinth** thought they were wise and all knowing. That allowed them to justify their sin and stay ignorant of God's truth. Paul writes his epistles to them to enlighten them.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Satan blinds unbelievers so they don't see the truth of the Gospel. "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Satan does all he can to keep men from leaving his kingdom/army and joining God's kingdom/army.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: All unbelievers are children of Satan (Matthew 13:37-39; John 8:44; 1 John 3:3-10) and are in Satan's kingdom (Colossians 1:12-14). All are bound by Satan (Acts 26:18) and blinded by him (2 Corinthians 4:3-4; 3:14-15) and are under Satan's power (1 John 5:19). They belong to him (Matthew 12:22-29) and are enslaved in a world system controlled by Satan (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19). Believers are a small minority, living in enemy-occupied territory, seeking to free some of those bound in darkness so they can find freedom in Christ. Meanwhile those who oppose us do all they can to dim our light and render us ineffective in our battle against them. That is where we find ourselves. That is our battle. We do not live in a neutral world nor are people nonaligned until they decide who they will follow. Everyone who has not committed their lives to Jesus is under the power of darkness and under judgment (John 3:16-21). Every one of them needs rescuing by us!

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Since all unbelievers are in Satan's possession, does that mean that all of them are demonized? Not all have had their lives invaded to the greatest extent, but without Jesus' protection and God's power they are potentially open to demonizing to one degree or another. They still have the image of God in them which we all have, and they have a free will to use to make wise choices, and that can limit the amount of influence demons can have over them. But

we must always be aware of the demonic when we witness to or counsel someone who is not a believer. That is why Paul's strong works about being 'unequally yoked' carry so much weight today (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God." This isn't just about marriage, but about business partnerships, close friendships, and the like. As believers we cannot be closely bound to those who are closely bound to demons.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: When a blind person does not see the sun shining, that is no reflection on the brightness of the sun but rather on the inability of the person to see it. The same is true of spiritual things. Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and in authority over it (Luke 4:6). Naturally he wants to keep his subjects in darkness, which he does. In addition, our sin nature keeps us from coming to God for salvation. It is only as His Spirit works in us to draw us to Him that we come (John 6:37-46; 15:16, 19; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11; Romans 9:23; Acts 16:13-15). Still, man has a free will to choose or reject salvation (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Acts 2:21; John 3:14-16; Exodus 8:15, 32). Somehow, even though our brains are not great enough to understand how it can be, both are true (John 6:37, 44, 47; Romans 9:1-23). It should not bother us that there are some things about God and His working that we are unable to understand for He is God (Daniel 4:35; Isaiah 55:8; Romans 11:34; 9:14-16; Isaiah 40:13, 2 Corinthians 2:16). Both are true, and when we get to heaven we will see how that can be (1 Corinthians 13:12). Our purpose is not to reconcile the two, for they are mutually exclusive, two truths which cannot be put together, but each must be believed by faith. What concerns us in this study is that at least part of the reason why it is necessary for God to work in someone for salvation is that Satan does all he can to blind them to the truth.

Therefore, it is imperative that we pray for those who are blinded. How should we pray? Pray that God would roll back the blindness for a time so they can clearly see the claims of the Gospel and make a free will choice to accept or reject Jesus. We can't pray for God to make them believe, for God will not violate a person's free will choice, but we can pray they can unmistakably see the issues so they can make their own choice. Now having said that, we must acknowledge that sovereign God will make sure every person who ever lived understands the issues and makes his or her own choice. No one will stand before Him in judgment and say they didn't know or didn't have a chance. Everyone will acknowledge God is just in condemning them for they had a chance to turn to Him but, of their own free will choice, turned it down. This whole issue takes great wisdom and none of us can really understand all of it. What we do understand is that God is fair and just, He doesn't want anyone to go to hell, and the proof of that is that He paid for our sins voluntarily when He wouldn't have had to. His love and justice have been proven and we cannot question that. Just because we cannot understand all He understands is no reason to doubt His goodness.

Pray for friends and relatives who aren't believers and are therefore blinded by Satan. Ask God to mercifully set aside that blindness so they can see the truth of the claims of Jesus Christ and freely accept His gift of salvation. Don't just pray this one time, make it a part of your daily prayer life.

BLOG 567: WINNING THE BATTLE FOR YOUR MIND (2 Corinthians - 4)

Paul wrote to the **Corinthians** to help them have victory over the problems that were plaguing the church. He explained that it wasn't just a matter of changing their actions, but of overcoming the wrong thoughts that were behind those wrong actions. Victory starts in their mind (**2 Corinthians 10:1-6**).

The key is in taking wrong thoughts captive. Paul clearly states that Christians battle an unseen enemy, Satan and his demons "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). There are powers that set themselves up against God. They use thoughts which lead to sinful actions. Actions start with thoughts, so the key is to have victory over the thoughts before they develop into actions.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Satan can and will use thoughts inserted into our minds to control us. He will use worldly philosophies and views to get access to and control of us. The majority of demonizing consists of demons putting thoughts into a person's mind or snatching thoughts out of a person's mind. While they don't have access to our minds and thoughts to the same extent that God does, the Bible makes it clear there is some access. Jesus said this in the sower and the seed: "Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown." (Mark 4:15). David's thought to take a census was demonic (I Chronicles 21:1ff; II Samuel 24:1ff). So was Ananias & Saphira's greed (Acts 5:3) and Saul's jealousy/anger (I Samuel 16:14-23). That's why, when talking about spiritual warfare, Paul says we are to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (II Corinthians 10:4-5). Not only can Satan's forces put wrong thoughts into our minds, they can snatch right thoughts out of our minds (Mark 4:15) so we forget them.

LESSON FOR TODAY2: Feelings and emotions are fine, important and necessary. They are icing on the cake of life. They add color and enjoyment to life. God created them for this purpose. But He didn't create them to be the source of our decision-making. Our feelings should be dependent on our rational thought. When our feelings get ahead of it or away from it then trouble comes. You know in your mind that you are an OK person, yet in your emotions you fear you will be rejected. When feelings aren't founded on the truth they can easily mislead. The truth is that you are a fine person, but your emotions reject that truth and try to do the 'thinking' themselves. We need to let our mind explain reality to our emotions. We must be very, very careful not to follow our emotions when they differ from our rational thoughts. One of the greatest needs of our emotions/feelings is security. This is closely related to love so we could say the core of our heart is love/security. Love must bring security but doesn't always do so. Other factors can tribute to our security as well.

Not long after writing to the Corinthians Paul wrote to the Romans about one of our most dangerous emotions: fear. He reminded his readers that God does not give us fear (Romans 8:15). Any fear we entertain comes from the flesh, our sin nature, the part of us that tends to sin. We had this before salvation and still have it after salvation.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Fear is one of Satan's biggest weapons. Demons are often behind it and use fear (Romans 8:15). If it takes the form of insecurity, anxiety, worry, preoccupation with problems, or whatever, it is still fear. Demons put fear of David into Saul (I Samuel 18:10-15) and put fear and terror into Eliaphaz by gliding by his face (Job 4:15). Anything not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). God does not give us fear (II Timothy 1:7; Romans 8:15), so if you experience fear realize it is not from God but from Satan. This doesn't mean it is always through demonizing, for you can be attacked with fear without being demonized.

Fear takes root when we choose to focus on circumstances instead of God. Peter walking on water is a good example. When his eyes were on Jesus his faith was strong, but when he looked at the waves they grew (in his mind) to be greater than Jesus' power. Thus, he started sinking. He then did the right thing, though, and put his eyes back on Jesus.

Trust is the antidote to fear. How can we understand trust, what it means and how it works? I think understanding how a family should work is the best answer. God established a family relationship to answer all those questions. He is the Father; we are the children. Do your children trust you? What do they have to do to earn your love? What do you expect of them? It's exactly the same with us and God. Jesus says we are to be like little children in order to learn faith and trust. Let your children teach you. Put yourself in their position - with a Perfect Father.

Thank God for your feelings and emotions and the richness they add to life. If you have problems controlling any of your emotions, pray about it now and turn them over to Him. Write down some scripture truth you can read to help your mind explain reality to your emotions when they threaten to get away from you.

BLOG 568: PAUL WAS DEMONIZED (2 Corinthians - 5)

Paul shares part of his own testimony about God's grace when he writes his second letter to the Corinthians. He tells about his own personal battle with demons. "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, 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 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Clearly, believers can be attacked by demons, for Paul says his battle was with a "messenger" (literally 'angel') of Satan. But God was in control and, like with Job, allowed this only for His glory and Paul's growth. God is more concerned in making us what we need to be than giving us what we want to have - a nice, easy life.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Sometimes God has a greater purpose than casting out every demon as soon as we pray. Sometimes complete deliverance never comes, like with Paul in this passage. Paul testifies God then provides the grace needed to withstand. God wants us to learn to depend on Him (Psalm 119:59,92). Of course, if the demonic opening is allowed to continue then the demonizing will continue, too (Psalm 94:12-16; 81:11-14).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: God does not want us to know what Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' was, just that it was exceedingly painful and that he really wanted freedom from it. God allows different 'thorns' in each of our lives for He knows what we need to keep coming back to Him. If you haven't been healed (spiritually, emotionally or physically) that isn't because of lack of faith on your part, but because it is God's perfect will for you, your growth and your testimony.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Sometimes God isn't saying no, He just wants us to persevere. Paul did that when he prayed 3 times. Never quit after the first or second try. Deliverance is a process He uses to teach us things about Himself and ourselves. He wants us to persevere in faithfulness to Him throughout for that helps us learn to depend on Him and trust Him. It's also part of the way He works to make us more like Jesus.

Victory usually comes gradually, as we learn to fight and take back ground that was given to the enemy. When the Jews entered the Promised Land under Joshua, God gave them victory, but one battle at a time, one generation at a time. He didn't give all the land to them at once. He wanted them to learn to fight, to keep trusting Him, to develop patience and perseverance. What was true of them physically is true of us spiritually. So, don't give up. Persevere. It may be hard to see progress but remember - there is improvement. Look back at your life and you'll see improvement in the past to the present.

You certainly wouldn't want to go back! Progress is slow but steady, like the story of the tortoise and the hare. Also be encouraged because when things get hard it's obvious the enemy is throwing everything at you, he can. That means this is as bad as it gets, this is all he can do. If he could do more he would. While this is bad, knowing it is as bad as it gets and that it will gradually but certainly get better helps. It takes time. God is interested in the process you are going through as you grow, not just the final product. You do the same thing with your children as you help them grow and mature. He wants you to learn trust, perseverance and faithfulness. You need to learn to use your sword, the Word of God. You must learn to hear His voice and follow Him.

Keep faithfully pursuing the Lord in whatever you are going through. Ask others to pray for you. Remember to focus on Jesus, not your problems or the demonic. Praise and worship Him. Memorize Scripture to quote when tempted/attacked. That is VERY important!

How are you at persevering? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself? How would God rate you? What can you do to improve your rating? Start doing it today!

BLOG 569: WHAT DO DEMONS REALLY LOOK LIKE?

The world claims to not believe in Satan or demons, but it is certainly preoccupied with them. They are common themes in art, literature, movies, TV programs and especially video games. They are depicted in many different forms and ways, but what do they really look like?

Since they, like angels, do not have a physical body, we do not have a clear description in the Bible (Jude 1:6; 2 Peter 2:4). When depicted or described by the secular world, they are ugly, evil, destructive, dark, violent and scary (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Sometimes Satan is presented as a smooth-talking, intelligent figure who is suave and attractive. His true sinister nature is concealed beneath his immense charm. This is more in line with the way Paul describes him as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

If we aren't sure what they look like, can we know when we encounter one? Most definitely! Their spiritual presence can be clearly understood. The Holy Spirit in us will react to the evil in them and alert us immediately. He will help us sense their evil presence so we can be alert and on our guard. They are crafty and deceptive (Genesis 3:1, 2 Corinthians 11:3; Romans 16:20). Satan is a roaring lion seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8), a dragon (Revelation 20:1-6) and a great beast with horns (Daniel 7) and tails (Revelation 18).

In third world countries, like India, they manifest in evil ways to cause fear in people. In more 'civilized' cultures, like the USA and Europe, they deceive people into thinking they don't exist. This is actually more dangerous.

While we may not be able to see them with our physical eyes, we can certainly 'see' them through spiritual eyes as God's Spirit pricks our spirit in awareness. We never know when that might happen. That's why we must keep our armor on at all times (Ephesians 6:10-17). Demons shudder at the name of Jesus (James 2:19). He has given us authority in His name to cast our demons and deliver those who seek to be free (Luke 10:17-20; Mark 16:15-18). The truth of God's Word will counter Satan's lies (Matthew 4:1-11; Psalms 119:105-108) and the power to overcome sin in their lives (John 1:5; Hebrews 2:14; James 4:7; 1 John 4:4).

So don't look for them with your physical eyesight, but be sensitive to the Spirit's work inside of you. Trust His impulses and warnings. Don't ignore His proddings and promptings. Spend time in His Word, meditating and listening to Him. Let Him be your eyes and you'll never go wrong.

John 14:16-17, 26 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. ...

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

BLOG 570: DEMONIC WORK IN THE CHURCH TODAY

We in the west are naïve and ignorant of Satan's work. This provides a perfect cover for them. They minister their evil virtually undetected. No wonder so many Christians and churches are struggling today!

They are behind the false doctrines that split churches and mislead Christians (1 Timothy 6:3-5). We have lies that deny God's Word such as humanism, new age, evolution, political correctness, LGBTQ+ teachings and many others. Then there are things that twist God's Word like the prosperity gospel, name it and claim it teachings, those claiming all should be healed and others saying all must speak in tongues. Some endorse legalism, denying grace and promoting works. Others go to the other extreme and push liberalism, making everything grace with no absolutes from God's Word.

A second work of the enemy in the church today is hypocrisy. Many claim to be believers but they continue to live in sin and self-righteousness. Ananias and Saphira are examples (Acts 5). So is Achan (Joshua 7). Satan only needs one person or couple to give him an opening to wreak havoc on the ministry of that fellowship. I've seen him try it in the church I pastored, more than one time. Satan plants a counterfeit Christian in the body who is friendly and sincere. And there is almost no limit to the damage they can do if the rest of the Body is not following closely to the Lord.

Another problem in the church which demons feed is that of judging and looking down on those who are different or who have had sin in their past. We label those who have had problems with addictions, sex, unemployment, etc. We are fully aware of the divorced, prodigals who have returned and those from different racial or cultural backgrounds than us. There is no difference to Jesus (Galatians 3:28) but often to us there is. We may try to hide it, but self-righteousness and pride can grow inside us.

We may consider these sins as normal and natural struggles of life. We may not see them as something demons promote and feed, and many times they have no need to get involved because we can do it all from our sin nature. But in many ways, large and small, they are causing division, discontent and a turning from the truth of God's Word. It's hard enough to fight an enemy we can't see, but when we aren't even aware there is a battle, we allow them to have their way unopposed. And that is happening to way too many Christians and churches today.

2 Corinthians 2:11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Are you aware of your weak spots and vulnerable areas where demons can attack and defeat you? What about in your church?

What are your plans to have victory over there in your life? What plans does your church have?

BLOG 571: SHOULD YOU MINISTER DELIVERANCE TO OTHERS?

Someone wrote to me and asked how I knew when I was ready to begin ministering deliverance to others who were battling with demons. They want to, but aren't sure if they are ready. The question made me think. Here's what I wrote:

The first time I prayed for deliverance for someone who was demonized I was not ready. I did not know nearly enough about God's Word in this area. But God brought someone into my life that needed help and needed it right then. Either I talked and prayed with him, or the demons stayed in

control. So, I gave it my best shot and God did the rest. He used it to bring freedom to that person. As I look back, there was something good about not knowing what I was doing but having to totally, 100% depend on God to do it all. I think that's just what He wanted!

That was well over 40 years ago. I've talked and prayed with many people since. But still, I never feel "ready". Even now. How can I possibly be ready to take on Satan and his demons? I know it is God doing it through me. I am the channel. He does the work.

I've always struggled with fear. I see that sin everywhere in my line of ancestors. But God has kept me from having a fear of Satan and demons. He infuses me with a holy anger, a righteous indignation against these evil beings that bring so much harm to others. He gives me complete assurance that I am safe in Him, and that is always the case. I cannot let them put fear in me. That is the big key for me. It's not about me, it's about the person I am helping. It's about God versus Satan. I'm just an instrument of God.

Do I always know what to say or do? No! But God puts the right questions, the accurate Scriptures, the correct insight and the exact words to pray just when I need them. It's not my work, it's His work done through me. Perhaps that is all part of the spiritual gifting God has given me to do this work. Never the less, if He puts it in your heart to counsel someone about spiritual warfare and pray for their deliverance, He will give you with wisdom, insight, courage and words you will need. You are the channel, not the source.

God used a donkey to speak to Balaam and a little girl to guide Naaman to Elisha. He will certainly speak and work through you if you let Him. He doesn't need your ability, but He does need your availability. Just be open and available for whatever God wants you to do. Then just do your best step by step, in prayer. If you find God leading you into this type of ministry, I'd be glad to help mentor you along the way. Just email me.

Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Has God given you the privilege of sharing the freedom that He alone brings with someone in bondage? Have you prayed for that person or followed up with them? Why not do so today.

Are you willing to let God use you in minister deliverance to someone in bondage? Tell Him you are, and be alert to the opportunity when it comes. (Feel free to write me with any questions you may have.)

BLOG 572: SATAN IS ALIVE AND WELL TODAY

Several years ago, Hal Lindsay wrote a book called, "Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth." It's still true. However, in our culture, he hides his tracks well. What better way to work unopposed than to convince people you don't exist? It's like being invisible.

People today will tell you that believing in Satan is old-fashioned and superstitious. In our scientific age, they say, we know better. Why should people be wary of something that is only fiction? This comes right from the one who deceived Eve in the garden of Eden.

Lying is fundamental to Satan's plan and purpose (John 8:44). He cannot tolerate truth. When he tried his lies on Jesus in the wilderness temptations, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. He used God's truth to expose the lies of His enemy. Paul says that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). It is our only offensive weapon.

If someone is invisible and be whispering and spreading lies without people knowing where they come from, much havoc can be caused. He tells us lies about himself, lies about God, lies about others and lies about ourselves. How do you know when something is a lie? Anything that does not line up to the truth in the Bible is a lie.

How are we to have victory against this unseen enemy? First, we need to recognize he exists and that he hates us and will do anything he can to ruin our lives. We must be on our guard against this roaring lion who seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8-9).

We do this by submitting to God and resisting his attempts to deceive us (James 4:7). Satan may have control of the earth, but he does not have control of God's people. We have a free will to determine who we will listen to and follow.

Isaiah 54:17 reminds us, "No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and this is their vindication from me declares the Lord."

Our enemy does not fight fair, but he fights. Are you aware of the lies and deceptions he uses against you? Don't go to one extreme and fear him. But don't go to the other extreme and forget about him. Remember who your enemy is. Many times, we fight battles against people in our lives. We feel a family member or an enemy needs to be defeated. They are not the ones we are to fight. Remember who your enemy is. Others may deny him or ignore him, but God's people must always be alert against him.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. ... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

BLOG 573: BACK TO THE BASICS

Suppose you've been struggling against demonic influence for some time. You've confessed, renounced, repented, forgiven and apologized as necessary. But still the battle continues at a furious pace. What to do now? Don't panic, fear or look for some quick short-cut to victory.

What should you do? Whenever a sports team is struggling, they go back to the basics. When a business is foundering, they need to make sure they are following good basic using good basic business principles. The same is true in living the Christian life. When we are struggling and don't seem to be having victory, we need to go back to the basics the basics. These are some of the basics:

1 Spend time with Jesus every day, preferably in the morning when you first wake up. Read your Bible. Read a whole Bible book, don't just jump around reading a few verses here and there every day. Ask God to teach you about Himself as you read. Then spend some time in prayer. Confess any sin you are aware of in your life which you haven't confessed before. Confession means agreeing with God that it is sin. Spend some time praising Him for Who and what He is and thanking Him for all He has done for you. Then pray for the needs of others and finally for your own needs.

2. Make sure there is no sin in your life. We all sin and continue to sin, that's why we confess it (1 John 1:9). But if there are any sins that are ongoing, you must do everything in your power to have victory over them. Sin breaks our fellowship with God and opens us to attack by the enemy. Ask God to give you the strength to overcome these things (1 Corinthians 10:13). . They may be hard at first for they can be long-time habits and the enemy doesn't want you to stop them, but they are important to stop. Commit to stopping. If you do fail confess it and start over again. This includes thoughts, attitudes, things you should be doing but aren't, good you do out of self-centered motives, unforgiveness, anger, jealousy and others.

3. Make sure you go to a church that preaches the Bible and that you attend regularly. It is important to worship and fellowship with other Christians. We all need worship, Bible study, fellowship and meeting other people. Make sure you do this as often as you can. If you work Sunday mornings try to change your schedule or go other times during the week when you can. This is a great way of growing and gaining strength from others.

Start working on these 3 each day and you'll build a solid foundation with God. Consistent faithfulness weakens the work of the flesh and demons so you can begin to have victory again. It took you a long time to get into this place you are in and it will take some time to grow out of it as well. If God just quickly removed everything and made your life perfect you would soon be tempted to get back into some of those things, or something else. That's why it's important to grow spiritually and get stronger so that as these things fade you stay close to Him.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 Christian brothers, we ask you, because of the Lord Jesus, to keep on living in a way that will please God. I have already told you how to grow in the Christian life. The Lord Jesus gave us the right and the power to tell you what to do. God wants you to be holy. You must keep away from sin.

No matter how long you have been a Christian, it's always beneficial to keep going back to the basics. That's where the 'game' is won or lost. It's easy to slip in one or more areas. How are you doing in the things mentioned above? What improvements can you make?

BLOG 574: HOW TO PRAY FOR THOSE IN BONDAGE

Praying for others is important. Praying for those in demonic oppression is even more important. We can't pray for God to deliver them, because God respects their free will and never forces anyone in any direction. However often they are confused, blinded and buried in darkness so they can't clearly see the issues in their true perspective. We can and should pray that God will temporarily restrain any demons from exerting any influence on them so they have an open perspective of the choices they are making and their impact. That way, too, they can have an opportunity to repent and turn from those sins while can lead to freedom from demonic activity in their lives.

If the person hasn't confessed the opening themselves that still blocks their relationship with God, but by interceding for them we can slow down or stop (at least temporarily) the demonic impact so the person can be free from that influence and be better able to turn to God for themselves. Now if they continue in the sin they keep opening the door. All you can do is keep trying to close it by asking God for mercy in their lives so they can make a free-will decision to follow God or not.

So, if you have a friend or loved one that seems to be in bondage to sin, intercede for them and ask God to have mercy by binding up what is working against them so they can have a time of openness to clearly see the issues and make their own free will choice. This won't bring them total, final freedom because that is up to them and God won't force freedom on them if they don't want it. But it will give them an opportunity to clearly decide. This is the best you can do for others in sin, but it is something you can do. So, ask God to show you whom He wants you to pray for in this way and then faithfully persevere until they repent or God allows you to stop.

Ephesians 6:18 - Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

Philippians 4:6 - Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Is there someone God want you to pray for in this way? If so make sure you faithfully for any demons working against them to be bound and for them to clearly see the truth so they can make their own free will choice. That doesn't mean they will turn to God - some prefer their sin and don't want to humble themselves. But you will have done all you can for them.

BLOG 575: CLOSE THOSE GENERATIONAL DOORS!

Parents have a great effect on their children. This happens in two ways. One is by example and influence. Children learn sins from their parent's example and that gives opening to demonizing. The second way is when demons who have access to a parent claim access to the child, too. When a demon has access to a person, he also claims right to all that person has, including their children. The Bible says God "punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:8-9; Exodus 34:6-7). The Bible says that children are affected by their parents' sins (Ezekiel 18:2) and this is one of the ways. In fact, this is one of the most common reasons people are demonized.

This is especially true of first-born males, for Satan seeks to claim them just as God does (Exodus 34:20). If you notice some of the same problems in your life as in your siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, or grandparents, it could very well be ancestral demonizing. The same demons have access to those in the family and do the same work in various members (not all members, that would be too obvious). They claim the blood line and use that as access.

Generational bondage is often discerned by the sin patterns that repeat from generation to generation. It is not uncommon to observe generations of abuse, addiction, hatred, superstition and fear, pride, control and manipulation, rejection, sexual sins and perversions, aberrant religious beliefs, witchcraft, and rebellion etc. If you see some patterns in the symptoms or characteristics of demonizing in others in your family that could show ancestral access. That is why so often a boy who hates his father for beating his mother grows up to beat his own wife, or a child of an alcoholic becomes an alcoholic also.

Generational bondage can be broken by personally repenting of and confessing the sins of past generations. Claim the blood of Christ as stronger than your blood line and put that access under the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:15). Claim that you are a "new creation, old things have passed away, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Ask God to turn curses into blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5). Read the Bible verses I referred to as part of your prayer. Following is a sample prayer. There is nothing

"Dear Father, I acknowledge before you the sins of my parents and ancestors. I know that they have sinned because all men and women are sinners. And so, I openly confess the sins of my parents and ancestors. I am sorry for their sins against you and I ask that you not hold their consequences against me or my descendants. I claim the finished work of Jesus Christ, Who bore all my sin upon Himself. I take back any openings given to Satan's forces by my ancestors' sin.

"Dear Jesus, please set me free from all evil influences coming from my parents and ancestors in the name of Jesus. I know I am a new creation in Christ. Old things have gone and all things have become new. I here and now reject and disown all the sins of my ancestors. As one who has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, I cancel out all demonic working that has been passed on to me from my ancestors. As one who has been crucified and raised with Christ and who sits with Him in heavenly places, I reject any and every way in which Satan may claim access to my family or me. I declare myself to be eternally and completely committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name I now command every demon that is working against me to flee my presence and my family and never to return.

'I now ask You, heavenly Father, to fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I submit my body as an instrument of righteousness, a living sacrifice, that I may glorify You in my life. All this I do in the name & authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

Deuteronomy 5:9 I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. I punish the children, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren for the sins of their fathers who hate Me.

Do you struggle with sin patterns or issue which your parents or grandparents also struggled with? Do you see patterns in your children that could come from you or your mate? If any of these are true, use the prayer above.

BLOG 576: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

One of Satan's best arguments to turn people against God is the issue of suffering. If God is good, how could He allow suffering? If there is a God at all, how could He allow suffering?

The question as to why some have so little has no clear answer. Why does God allow people to suffer and struggle? How can a God of love allow so much evil to continue? God doesn't defend Himself or explain what He allows. He gives us a free will choice and as a result sin and the resulting evil are the natural consequences or turning from Him. Still, innocent people suffer.

The implication is that either God isn't in control of everything or He isn't good. Either way He loses. No wonder this tool is so effective for Satan and his forces. How can we answer it?

We can't try to evaluate God's person and character by these things for He has proven His character and love by leaving heaven, becoming a man, living on earth, then going to cross to take on the punishment for every sin we would ever commit. That proves His love for us beyond a shadow of a doubt. He definitely is good. If it weren't for the cross we would all deserve eternity in hell from this moment on. So, anything less than hell from now on is His grace and mercy. Why He seems to show more to some than others is not up to us to judge. God isn't accountable to us. We cannot stand in judgment of Him until we know all the facts as He knows them and see everything as well or better than He sees it. So, we trust in His character as revealed by His works in our life. We focus on the known, not the unknown.

Many things seem unfair to little children but they must trust their parents. Getting an injection from a doctor or having a pretty shiny knife taken away may seem to a child that a parent doesn't love them but a child doesn't have the perspective to truly view what is happening. We don't have God's perspective on life either. We fall back on the fact that He is in sovereign control of everything and that that all He does is out of love for us. More than that we cannot know.

Romans 8:35-39 Who can keep us away from the love of Christ? Can trouble or problems? Can suffering wrong from others or having no food? Can it be because of no clothes or because of danger or war? 36 The Holy Writings say, "Because of belonging to Jesus, we are in danger of being killed all day long. We are thought of as sheep that are ready to be killed." 37 But we have power over all these things through Jesus Who loves us so much. 38 For I know that nothing can keep us from the love of God. Death cannot! Life cannot! Angels cannot! Leaders cannot! Any other power cannot! Hard things now or in the future cannot! 39 The world above or the world below cannot! Any other living thing cannot keep us away from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

What do you say when people ask how a loving god can allow innocent people to suffer? When are you most apt to doubt God's love and goodness? What have you learned from this blog that can help you better trust Him when you don't understand?

BLOG 577: WHEN IT SEEMS DELIVERANCE FAILS

God can and will set you free from oppression and demonizing when you follow His guidelines. The problem is that we are in a hurry and God is never in a hurry. We are just concerned about the end result, but God is more concerned about what happens along the way. We are interested in the product but God is interested in the whole process.

Deliverance is a process He uses to teach us things about Himself and ourselves. He wants us to persevere in faithfulness to Him throughout for that helps us learn to depend on Him and trust Him. It's also part of the way He works to make us more like Jesus.

I know God is greater than anything we face and will give the victory. I know the victory comes gradually, as we learn to fight and take back ground that was given to the enemy. When the Jews entered the Promised Land under Joshua, God gave them victory, but one battle at a time, one generation at a time. He didn't give all the land to them at once. He wanted them to learn to fight, to keep trusting Him, to develop patience and perseverance. What was true of them physically is true of us spiritually. So don't give up. Persevere. It may be hard to see progress but remember - there is improvement. Look back at your life and you'll see improvement in the past to the present.

You certainly wouldn't want to go back! Progress is slow but steady, like the story of the tortoise and the hare. Also be encouraged because when things get hard it's obvious the enemy is throwing everything at you he can. That means this is as bad as it gets, this is all he can do. If he could do more he would. While this is bad, knowing it is as bad as it gets and that it will gradually but certainly get better helps. It takes time. God is interested in the process you are going through as you grow, not just the final product. You do the same thing with your children as you help them grow and mature. He wants you to learn trust, perseverance and faithfulness. You need to learn to use your sword, the Word of God. You must learn to hear His voice and follow Him.

Keep faithfully pursuing the Lord in whatever you are going through. Ask others to pray for you. Remember to focus on Jesus, not your problems or the demonic. Praise and worship Him. Memorize Scripture to quote when tempted/attacked. That is VERY important!

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

How are you at persevering? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself? How would God rate you? What can you do to improve your rating? Start doing it today!

BLOG 578: THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

The truth seems to be in short supply today. As a result, we live in a time when there is little trust in the words of others, be they politicians, salesmen, lawyers, car repairmen or even our spouses. Pa on Little House on the Prairie would give his word and stuck by it. Everyone knew he would honor what he said. And he wasn't unique in that characteristic. We have come a long way from the time when a man's word was his honor. Yet honesty is important for any nation, any church or organization, any family or any relationship to thrive. It's so important God included it in His Ten Commandments. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

That God hates lying is clear from Scripture (Proverbs 6:16-19; 14:5; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8; etc.). Satan was the first liar and is the father of lies (John 8:44). When we lie, we are being just like him and he loves it! Tempting us to lie is very fruitful for him.

Parents teach their children not to lie from when we are young. Yet lying is something that is commonly done. It is an easy way to avoid negative consequences, to create or protect an illusion of who we are, to get what we want or to gain control of a situation. Lying is very easy to do, a strong temptation to many.

Yet Exodus 20:16 clearly forbids lying. This commandment focuses especially on lying under oath – perjury. Unfortunately that is no longer a big deal today because it has gotten very common. It's nothing new. False witnesses were used against Jesus during His trial (Matthew 26:59-60). To the Jews it was important to give "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." In fact, God's law said that if someone gave false testimony in court that person would be punished with whatever penalty would have been inflicted upon the person against whom he gave the wrong testimony (Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

God not only forbids perjury; He forbids any kind of lying. Deliberate, premeditated lies, such as Jacob used to deceive his father into thinking he was Esau, are also forbidden. Large or small, black or white – there is no difference. A lie is a lie.

Sometimes things that are said are not direct lies, but are meant to misinform and deceive. They purposely mislead. We allow others to believe that which is not true. Joseph's brothers never said he was killed, they just showed their father a torn, bloody coat and asked him what could have happened to cause this. They never lied in what they said, but all they did was deceptive and therefore a lie.

Keeping quiet when you know the truth is also deceptive and a lie. Keeping silent is a crime God will not overlook (Leviticus 5:1). Slander is another form of lying as well. Gossip, rumor, innuendo all are deceptive. Romans 1:29 lists slander as one of the marks of a depraved lifestyle. Potiphar's wife was guilty of this when she falsely accused Joseph of attacking her.

Even flattery is condemned in the Bible when it is insincere or done to manipulate. God warns against those who lie with flattering lips (Psalm 12:2-3). Insincere compliments, buttering someone up, is deceptive and dishonest. Careless exaggeration is likewise deceptive and dishonest. Salesmen, politicians, even preachers are guilty of this sin. Things are promised which are known to be untrue. That's a lie.

The worst kind of sin of lying, though, is lying to God. How do we lie to Him who knows our heart? When we make a promise or commitment to Him and don't keep it, we are lying. Ecclesiastes 5 says it is better to not make a vow than to make a vow and then break it. Have you ever made any promises or commitments to God which you haven't been keeping? Ask Him to forgive you and do whatever is necessary, right now, to carry through on what you said. Lying is a sin, especially lying to God. (May 30, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

When are you most tempted to lie or deceive? What can you do to have victory over it?

BLOG 579: IS IT EVER OK TO LIE?

We saw in the previous blog that Satan is the source of all lies and deception (John 8:44) and we are never to lie. Often Satan tempts us to lie in any way he can. A lie is a lie and there is never justification for it. But what about when the truth is worse than a lie?

Is it ever right to tell a lie? It's easy to give a sound 'No' to that question, and that is the correct answer, but sometimes things aren't always that black and white. As a pastor, someone in my church

may ask me what I think of their new hair style. I have my own personal preferences, and if their likes differ from mine, how honest am I to be in criticizing their choices?

If you are a married man you run into this as well. You are getting ready for a long awaited and much needed evening out with your wife. You are looking forward to it, and so is she. In fact, she got something new to wear just for this occasion. Your wife gets dressed and asks you, "Do these jeans make me look fat?" So, what do you say?

The typical male will probably pretend he doesn't hear her while he frantically searches for the 'right' answer to this question, all the while knowing there really isn't one. But perhaps she'll drop the subject if he doesn't hear her. Unfortunately, that doesn't happen as she asks again. So, he gives a very noncommittal answer, "I love you in jeans." Hopefully he'll get through this checkpoint and move on with the evening.

But that isn't to be, for she keeps pushing, "I need to know, do these make me look fat?" So, what do you do? You must answer. Do you lie and give her the answer she wants to hear, or do you say something honest like "Don't blame it on the jeans!" If so, there goes date night. Is it ever OK to lie?

Before you are quick to answer remember that the midwives in Exodus 1:15-21 lied when they were supposed to kill Hebrew males who were born. They didn't, but said it was because the women gave birth without calling them. There might have been some truth to that, but they were clearly deceiving those who asked. God blessed them and rewarded them for their stand. Nothing was said about their lying. Would it have been better to be guilty of murder instead of lying? Or should they have told the truth, been punished and replaced by someone who would kill the babies?

Or what about Rahab who hid the spies in Jericho and lied, saying she didn't know where they were and that they left the town? God blessed and rewarded her as well. Should Corrie ten Boom have been honest and told where she was hiding Jews from the Nazis?

Then there is David who fled from King Saul and covered it by saying he was going to have a special time of worship with God (1 Samuel 21:1-22:23). God used that to spare David's life, and nothing is recorded about it being a sin.

So, is it ever OK to lie? I can't give you a hard and fast rule about these things, although I wish I could. I think our motive, our reason for deceiving, has a lot to do with what God thinks about it. Each one of us has to be sensitive to God's leading in these cases. Only God can give you wisdom and peace in these Catch 22 cases.

And by the way, women, do you really want to know how the jeans make you look? If all you want is an objective opinion look in a mirror or ask a girlfriend. Don't tempt your husband to lie to spare your feelings. Besides, is it the truth you want, or reassurance that, to him, you are still good-looking? If that's what you are really asking, he should be able to give an honest, affirmative answer that can make your evening even better. (June 6, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Samuel 16:7 For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Do you believe it is sin to lie if the truth will hurt someone? Is it ever justifiable to lie?

BLOG 580: HOW TO BECOME A MORE TRUTHFUL PERSON

It's not easy to always tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Yet if we want to be like Jesus that is our goal. Satan is a deceiver, a liar from the beginning and the ultimate source of all lies (John 8:44). Jesus is truth (John 14:6; 18:37). There isn't any middle ground. Gray might

as well be black because it isn't white, and God demands 100% purity from us all the time. When the truth will hurt someone, what are we to do? Be sensitive to God's Spirit within, convicting or excusing us. Ask God to show you your deep motive behind what you choose to do in that situation.

So how can we become more truthful?

First, **practice creative silence**. Truth-telling begins with silence. When we speak less, we will speak more truthfully. The more a person talks the more likely they are to exaggerate, slander, mislead or stretch the truth. The Bible highly recommends talking less but listening more (Proverbs 10:19; 11:12; 13:3; 21:23). Creative silence means listening more and better, speaking less and praying while you are listening. Pray to be able to hear what is said, for most of us don't listen very well today. Pray for the right words to say when you do speak. Pray only God's truth will come out of your mouth. "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). The more we speak, the more chance there is for us to say something we shouldn't say. If we want to be more truthful, the first step is to speak less and listen more.

Second, **practice personal accountability**. Often, we aren't totally honest in what we say because we fear we will be rejected if we speak the truth. We think that if others really know us, they will dislike us. Therefore, we put on a mask of deception and pretend to be what we feel others want and will approve. Jesus calls this hypocrisy, and He hates it!

The way to be free from this is to have a person or persons to whom you are committed to being truthful. Be yourself. Let them know the real you. Ask them to ask you the hard questions about yourself. Encourage them to point out anything about your words or life that is not totally honest. And you help them the same way. Good friends help other friends find the courage to tell the truth.

Third, **commit to becoming a "Person of Truth."** We are to be known as people of the truth, but sometimes we are people of the lie. It takes commitment to the truth and a willingness to pay the price for total honesty to be a person of truth. This starts with being truthful about ourselves, for that is often where its hardest to be truthful. We lie to others about what we are feeling and how we are doing, but worst of all we lie to ourselves. We don't want to face the truth about our failings, our weaknesses or our sins. So, we justify them, we minimize them, we blame others for them or we ignore them. Jesus says the truth will set us free (John 8:32), and it will. But it may bring pain, it may be a hurtful process. So, we avoid the truth and live a lie. When we are willing to be hurt by the truth about ourselves, then and only then will be able to be set free.

Jesus came to earth "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). To be like Him we need to experience and live in grace, but we need to experience and live in truth as well. The truth. The whole truth. And nothing but the truth. (June 13, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 4:15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

Have you been having victory over dishonest or deceptive speech? Where do you still struggle the most? What can you do to have victory?

BLOG 581: ARE CURSES A REALITY TODAY?

(Written by Don Rogers, my mentor in spiritual warfare, in the 1970's.)

Are curses still applicable today? Deuteronomy 28:45-46 says Yes!

"All these curses shall come upon you, pursuing and overtaking you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God, by observing the commandments and the

decrees that he commanded you. They shall be among you and your descendants as a sign and a portent forever."

Most believers understand how the sins of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden brought about a curse upon humanity and the world in which they lived. The Lord pronounced specific curses that were related to the serpent, the woman and the man.

1. **The serpent** - would crawl upon his belly and enmity would be place between him and the woman and between his offspring and hers. (Gen 3:14-15)

2. **The woman** - would have pain in child birth and was placed under the authority of her husband (Gen 3:16).

3. **The man** - representing humanity was cut off from the tree of life, and the ground was cursed with thorns and thistles so that man would have to toil with great difficulty to produce crops until he died (Gen 3:17-19). The man and the woman were driven out of the garden of Eden and God had the entrance guarded by cherubim and a flaming sword. (Gen 3:24)

Are the results of these curses still existent today? Yes, they are and we continue to suffer because of them.

Suddenly the quality of Adam and Eve's lives changed. They would not continue to have the comfort they had in the garden and in the Lord's presence. Their blessings were taken from them as their circumstances were reduced.

These are the effects of curses (1) blessings lost, (2) abilities limited, (3) position and circumstances reduced, (4) the quality of life affected, (5) future posterity also affected

Spiritual bondage has all these effects. Each of us has a CHOICE between blessing and curse.

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today . . . "
(Deuteronomy 11:26-28)

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him." (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Only when Christ returns and establishes His kingdom will there no longer be any curses. **Revelation 22:3**

(ADDED BY JERRY SCHMOYER) If you feel you or someone in your family may have been cursed, remember to ***"Bless them that curse you"*** (Matthew 5:44). Treat the person with love and kindness, for when you return good for evil the ***"undeserved curse does not come to rest"*** (Proverbs 6:2). Break that curse against you in Jesus' name, claiming Galatians 3:10,13 which says ***"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"*** Ask God to turn the curse to a blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5). (June 20, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

LOG 582: DEALING WITH MY DOUBTS (ALSO WITH INDIA BLOGS)

I consider myself a rational, analytical type person. I need proof before I'll believe something. I don't go by my feelings or emotions. I've always been this way. It's the way God created me.

I first came to know the Lord is my savior watching Billy Graham when I was 10 years old. That was 65 years ago. I have seen the Lord do many things in my lives and the lives of others. Yet I

still get hit by nagging doubts from time to time. What if this is all a fake? What if this isn't true? What if there is no God or Jesus?

I have studied apologetics my whole life. I have taught on this subject often and even wrote a book about it. I know all the sound, rational reasons to prove that God exists, Jesus is God, and the Bible is true. Still, the enemy keeps shooting those doubts into my mind.

I've concluded that there is no rational, logical way of coming to faith. Faith is just that, faith. Yet, there is one overwhelming way that I personally know God exists. It is far beyond the rational, intelligent arguments I know so well. It has to do with the change He has made in my life.

I know what I am capable of in my own flesh, even on a good day. Did I fill myself full of peace, joy, forgiveness, humility, unconditional love and a desire to serve others? That is not me! I cannot manufacture that. I cannot counterfeit them. I know what I would be like as a person if I had never met Jesus. Everything between that person and the person I now am proves to me that Jesus exists.

When I think of what He has done for me, how He has paid for my sins on the cross and come back to life, all I can do is praise Him. My heart wells up with praise. I sing out loud and raise my hands in worship (when I am home alone)! The joy sometimes turns to tears at the wonder of the cross. I don't get that way about other things, only about Jesus. It must be God's Spirit working inside of me, lifting me up. I'm not an emotional person. I can't even fake it. But what I feel when I think of Him and what He's done for me is beyond explanation. It has to do with the Holy Spirit revealing His goodness and love to me.

An old favored him of mine concludes with "You ask me how I know He lives. He lives within my heart." Yes, that is very subjective. But to me it is very real. You ask me how I know he lives? I know he lives in my heart. That's the only explanation. It's something I know is true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

So, when the doubts pop up, that's what I think of. That's what I remember. I am a new creation. The old has gone the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). I have been crucified with Christ, yet it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:20). (June 27, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 "These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except for their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God"

Do you ever need proof of his reality? Has he changed your life? How do you account for the praise and worship that wells up in you when you worship Him? That's Jesus. There's no other explanation.

BLOG 583: CAN SATAN READ YOUR MIND?

Can Satan read your mind? The answer is no. He can put thoughts into your mind, like he gave David the thought to take a census (1 Chronicles 21:1). He can snatch thoughts out of your mind, like in the parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23). But does he have access to every thought in our innermost being? I don't think so. Only our sovereign God knows that.

Satan is a very good judge of human character. He has thousands of years of watching and learning. He is highly intelligent. He has demons assigned to each one of us that watch us and get to know us very well. Therefore, they can make very good guesses and assumptions about what we're thinking and what will be doing. But our mind is still our own. We still have a free will. Even the man in the Gadarenes with 2,000 demons still had a free will that allowed him to come and yield before Jesus (Mark 5:6).

We can allow Satan's forces to influence our thoughts, just like we can allow the holy Spirit to do the same. However, we are ultimately responsible for our thoughts and the actions that come from them.

When we pray silently inside, God hears. When we rebuke Satan or his demons silently, God hears and enforces that rebuke. Even if the demons do not hear it, God does and carries it out. It's not in our words where the power resides, it's in God enforcing what we say. Everything goes through Him.

We cannot blame our evil thoughts on Satan or demons. They can put those thoughts in our minds, but it is up to us if we allow them to stay or reject them. We can't give Satan and his demons more credit than they deserve. Our own flesh, our sin nature, is fully capable of sin without any influence from Satan or demons. We can, and do, sin very well on our own without any help from Satan. He may be responsible for feeding you a sinful thought, but what you do with it is up to you.

If you struggle with controlling your thoughts, quote Scripture. When Jesus was tempted, He quoted Scripture to have victory over Satan's temptations. Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Psalm 119:9,11 tell us that it's through God's Word that we have victory. When you have these thoughts and attacks use Scripture to have victory. Ask God to give you some verses that will help against these things, write them down and memorize them. Say them over and over when these thoughts attack you. That is the only way to victory, and God guarantees it will work! (July 4, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

How are you doing with controlling sinful thoughts in your mind? Which give you the most difficulty? What can you do to have greater victory over them?

BLOG 584: SATAN DIDN'T MAKE ME DO IT

We've all heard the phrase, "The devil made me do it." That's a common excuse that even Christians use from time to time. But Satan cannot make us do anything. He can give us the thought or the idea. He can put an evil desire in our heart. But it's up to us to carry it out. He cannot force us.

Not all of our sin comes from Satan. We have our own sin nature. Jeremiah 17:9 says sin comes from our own heart. We have a free will to choose and act as we desire. James 4:1-4 says that wars come from within our heart. During the millennium, Satan and all his demons will be bound for a thousand years. Despite this, man will still sin and rebel. Man will still have a free will and use it as he chooses. When Satan is released at the end of the thousand years many of those alive on earth will choose to follow him. They had rebellion and sin in their hearts even when he was bound.

Don't blame Satan for everything. It gives him too much credit. He takes that recognition as worship and it empowers him. Don't assume there is a demon behind every bush, between every thought and every action. Instead, recognize and repent of your own sin. Admit how sinful you really are. Much of the time demons don't have to do anything because we choose to sin without their influence.

It's easy to get caught up in blaming Satan for everything. Even Eve blamed Satan for her own free will choice to disobey (Genesis 3:13). In order to have victory over sin in our life, we must recognize that it comes from within us. We must admit that and confess it (1 John 1:9). We must

allow God's Holy Spirit to fill us and we must follow Him in all we think and do. We must spend time reading the Bible and praying each day. Our lives must be characterized by praise and worship.

The devil can't make you do it. He can't make you sin. And he can't make keep you from following Jesus. Don't use him as an excuse. Admit your own failings. You have a free will choice to obey or disobey. No one can make you sin. It's up to you. (July 11, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Galatians 5:16-17 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Do you blame Satan or demons for things that are your own doing? Do you excuse your own sin by not taking responsibility for your choices and actions? Ask God to forgive you for that and to make you aware every time you are tempted to fall into that trap again.

BLOG 585: NO SHORTCUTS

I received a lot of emails from people asking for help with spiritual warfare in their lives. Many times, they want to talk on the phone so I can pray for them. They have been looking for someone who can pray and set them free from their bondage. They believe that if they get rid of the demons they will live happily ever after.

There are times when God does immediately and completely deliver. One prayer and a person's life is forever changed. They are delivered and free. However, that is the exception and not the rule. For most of us, freedom is a battle. There is no quick easy solution to our difficulties. God allows it this way so we will learn to fight. The Jews had to learn to fight behind Joshua to take the land. It was one battle after another as they gradually advanced. The same is true with us. Paul talks about the armor for our battle in Ephesians 6.

Spiritual warfare takes perseverance. It takes sacrifice. It takes time. Our bondage develops over time, and it takes time to overcome and defeat all of it. God could remove it in an instant, but in His wisdom, He wants us to learn how to battle. He wants us to learn what causes our bondage and grow through it. And he wants us to be able to help others who struggle. In Matthew 12:43-45 there is a story about a man who cast a demon out of his life but didn't fill his life with God's presence and so that demon came back with seven others and he was in much worse shape than before. That's a danger with just wanting demons gone without understanding and removing what gave them access in the first place.

I grieve for those who insist on finding the right person, church, TV program, website or whatever to bring them complete and instant deliverance. God's purpose is to help us mature to be like Jesus, not to give us an easy perfect life. Our battle with demons is one tool He uses to strengthen us, increase our faith and show us His power.

I have found that if a person perseveres in their faith, keeps their eyes on Jesus and grows spiritually, they will find gradual but lasting freedom from their oppression. Sometimes it is not God's will for them to have victory, but when that is the case, he promises his grace despite the oppression. That's what he told Paul when Paul prayed three times for deliverance did not receive it (2 Corinthians 12:8-10). Life is a battle. Battles aren't fun. Battles are won little by little. That's true of our battle was sin and Satan as well. (July 18, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

If you are in a battle, what is God trying to teach you? Are you learning it? Do you see Him making you more and more like Jesus? Are you patiently and consistently following Him, or are you demanding instant victory?

BLOG 586: EVERY BELIEVER IS A SOLDIER

God has gifted me with wisdom and experience in being able to deal with those struggling with spiritual warfare. Yet it is not me that brings them deliverance. It is always and only Jesus. Sometimes the people I work with think that I am special and my prayers carry extra weight with God. That is not so. It has nothing to do with me, it has everything to do with God. Each one of you prays to the same God I pray to.

It is true that God gifts some in certain areas like teaching, evangelism or spiritual warfare. Even if we are not gifted in one of those areas, we are still responsible to function in that area. Even if your gift is not evangelism, when God puts someone in your life who is not a believer, He works through you to share His message. He doesn't expect you to call a pastor or a professional to speak to that person. The same is true with spiritual warfare. Each and every one of you has the same power in prayer that I have. Each and every one of you can and should pray for yourself and for others. It is God that overcomes Satan's power, not my words or yours.

There is a time when it is good to ask others to pray for you. James says there is a time when you should call the elders to come and pray for you (James 5:14-16) but most of the time we can and must pray on our own. The Bible says we have not because we ask not (James 4:2-3). I think that is quite often the case in spiritual warfare.

Satan's lie is that you cannot pray for yourself or others, you don't know how to or you won't do it right. That is not true. Every Christian is a soldier. Every soldier is equipped to fight the battles God calls them to fight (Ephesians 6). I will gladly help anyone in their spiritual warfare or other issues in any way I can. But never sell short your own ability to pray for yourself or for others. The power in prayer is not in the one doing the praying but the one being prayed to. Always remember that. (July 25, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

John 14:13-14 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Do you have confidence in God when you pray? Do you ever feel your prayers aren't a strong as others and that is why God doesn't answer your prayers? If so, confess that lie as sin and pray trusting God will do what is right and best for you.

BLOG 587: LIES ABOUT SCRIPTURE

Fact number one. We need to feed on God's word to grow spiritually. There is no other way to become mature in our faith except by reading and studying the Bible.

Fact number two Satan does not want us to grow spiritually, so he will do anything he can to keep us from God's word. One of the main ways he does that is through feeding us lies about the Bible. Satan is a liar and everything he says is to deceive (John 8:44). We are not to be ignorant of

his tricks and traps (2 Corinthians 2:11). Be careful to avoid the lies he will feed you about God's word.

Lie number one: "You already know what the Bible says, so you don't need to spend time reading it." If we are busy, lazy or don't want to be convicted by God's word, this lie provides a great excuse to avoid it.. We can grab hold of this lie as an excuse to not spend God time in the Bible. The truth is none of us know God's word as well as we could or should. There is always more to learn. Even reading parts we know well bring fresh encouragement and spiritual strength. There's always more to be gained by reading the Bible.

Lie number two: "The Bible is too hard to understand, so don't bother trying to study it. Let the preachers do that." The truth is that anyone can read the Bible and gain from it. Even a child. There were times in history when Christians were not allowed to own a copy of the Bible. Now we all have many in our homes. That's a great privilege. But it doesn't do us any good in our homes unless we have it in our heads and hearts. You don't have to be a Bible scholar or know Greek or Hebrew to know what it says. Any believer can read it and God's Spirit will teach and apply God's truth to us.

Lie number three: "The translators got it all wrong, so don't bother reading it." While there can be controversy about how some things should be translated in the Bible, there is no controversy over the basic truths that it contains. There can be various ways of conveying a truth from one language to another. But that doesn't mean a particular translator is are wrong. It just means that it can be difficult for one language to convey exactly what another is saying. That doesn't mean any one translation is incorrect, though.

Lie number four: "The Bible is full of contradictions, so you can't trust what it says." There are no contradictions in Scripture regarding any doctrine or truth of consequence. There are places where one writer will say 100 people were killed and another will say it was a thousand. Scholars can give various explanations for this. But this does not mean the Bible is untrustworthy. Actually, it means just the opposite. If the Bible where a man-made book, those differences would have been corrected long ago instead of continued to be copied and passed on. The fact that they're still there shows that the Bible is brought to us in exactly the same as it was written.

Lie number five: "You're too busy now. You can read it later when you have more time. It's a great book to study just don't do it now." This, too, is a great excuse for those who are busy, lazy, or are living in disobedience to the Bible.

Studying God's Word takes effort and commitment, but the benefits are well worth it. It's easy to find justification to not do it, and Satan's lies are available for anyone looking for an excuse. He knows that Scripture brings victory over his forces and over sin in our lives, so it stands to reason he will do all we can to keep us from the Bible. How successful is his plan with you? (August 8, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

How much do you study your Bible? What reasons do you give for not spending more time reading it?

BLOG 588: AN INDIA PASTOR'S TESTIMONY

You may be aware that I have a ministry training pastors in India and other Third World countries. I received the following testimony from an Indian pastor who writes to me. What a

blessing it is to read about how God works in their lives! As you read, notice how real the work of Satan is in India. Note how he tries to keep the Light from spreading.

“I had come from a Hindu family and my parents used to worship, Naga (snake), Trees, Animal, Air, Moon, Sun, Earth, water, Men’s, Idolatry. They worshipped like 330 millions of god’s. Mostly my parents worshipped (snake God) as their personal God. In 1975 while my father is laboring in a farm a big snake (Naga) bite him on his left knee there is no proper medicine and hospitals in our Village for snake bite. My father was in a dangerous condition and he was in coma. All my village people around had lost their hopes. I also thought that for sure he is going to die. Our village people worshipped many Hindu gods, but there was no answer from any of them.

“There is a Church nearby village. My Mother rushed into the Church and knelt down and earnestly prayed to Jesus Christ. God the Lord our all mighty heard her prayer. Soon after her prayer my father slowly got well. At that time my mother made a covenant with God to send her only son to become a Pastor to do God’s Service. At that time my age was 12 years only.

“From my Childhood I used to Prayerfully attend the Church regularly and take an active part in Sunday School Programs. After completion of my 10th grade, after many prayers, our Lord called me through vision. He sought me and saved me and anointed me with His holy fire and God has called me for the full time in 1986. And I left my job opportunity as school drawing teacher. According to the word of God (1John1:7-9, Acts.2:38) I repented and baptized in 1987. And I was dedicated by Him for full time to do His work at the age of 18 years old. And I have faced numerous hardships but have not turned my back at any kind of situations and etc.,

“After that I wanted to join in the Theological Training in Bible College to become a Pastor to serve our God among the Gospel in unreached areas. I shared my thoughts with my uncle (Big Father) And he was very much happy and brought an application form the Bible College for me . And he arranged everything to join in Bible College. But unfortunately, my father was not happy about it. He forcefully made me stop going to Bible College. 10 days after this incident I met Electric Accident very dangerously, all the people around me thought that I was dead, but God did a great miracle and I was alive to serve Him . And my father realized his mistake and he himself took me to continue for Bible College training.

“My parents had worshipped Naga (Snake) as their God. But that snake only bite him and tried to kill him. But Jesus came to the earth to save His people from many kind of Sins. He shed His blood and died on the Calvary to save all the people from sin. Finally, my father came to know that Jesus Christ is the only God who would save His people.

“I have a specific His calling and desire to reach Tenali unreached areas. The first day I arrived I faced many persecution I was verbally treated many times by the antichristians. People there worship Krishna God. This God is very famous for all over India. People where I minister are very strong in Hindu faith. We have started churches and trained pastors, but many Pastors have been beaten for their faith. And they burned our Churches and Bibles and our clothes were torn as well. People strongly reject Jesus and the Gospel.

“There are so many places in the world where the truth Gospel of Christ has not reached. It is a fact even today in our India, there are areas where the Gospel of Christ was not reached, till today their beliefs are clouded in spiritual darkness only.

“My ministry was started by me with a single person, but today by the grace of God there is Team of 45 Pastor’s and Evangelists who Toil day and night invading the power of devil’s and extending in this area. We need your prayers and gifts for our ministry to grow.”

What a joy it will be in heaven hearing the testimonies of pastors we have crossed paths with! You'll meet and talk to the ones who benefitted from your prayers and gifts! That's all part of "laying up treasure in heaven" (Matthew 6:19-21). (August 15, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 589: DISCOURAGEMENT: TOOL OF SATAN

One of Satan's greatest tools against Christian is discouragement. Each one must face it from time to time. Living for Jesus can be very difficult as we face sin and temptation. Satan knows just what will discourage us and he uses it against us as he did with Elijah (2 Kings 19). He did the same with Timothy, who tried to lead a church that didn't want to follow. Some people opposed and challenged Timothy and he was unable to bring them under control. That led to discouragement.

Discouragement can also come when we are physically or emotionally tired. When we are drained, we don't have the energy or resources to stay strong. It's important to get enough healthy food, rest, exercise and relaxation to stay strong and fight off discouragement. That was part of God's cure for Elijah's discouragement (1 Kings 19:5-8).

Pressure can also cause discouragement. When we feel we have more to do than we have time, ability or resources to do it, we may want to quit trying and give in. But remember, God says He will bring to completion the good work He is doing in us (Philippians 1:6). We are just to faithfully do our best, the rest is up to Him.

Another cause of discouragement is when we struggle with a sin that seems to defeat us. Timothy was often controlled by fear. When our focus is on ourself and our failures, we will be discouraged. When we allow sin in our lives, we block God's Spirit from filling us with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Be alert to when you are feeling discouraged. Discouragement doesn't come from God; it is a tool of Satan to defeat and destroy us. Remember, God doesn't look at what we produce, He looks at our faithfulness in following Him. The results are up to Him, not us. We are only responsible to faithfully serve Him.

The best way to have victory over discouragement is to remember and rely on God's promises. He says He will always be with us (Joshua 1:1-9), never leave us (Hebrews 13:5), not give us more than we can handle with His help (1 Corinthians 10:13), His grace is always sufficient for whatever we are going through (2 Corinthians 12:9) and He will use whatever happens for our growth and His glory (Romans 8:28). (August 22, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 4:2 "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

1 Samuel 17:47 "and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."

When are you most apt to struggle against discouragement? What must you do to prevent or overcome it?

What promises in the Bible mean the most to you when you are discouraged?

Do you know anyone who is discouraged? Stop and pray for them right now. Reach out to them today with God's truth to encourage them.

BLOG 590: HEARTACHES OF BEING A PASTOR

I love pastors. I've been one my whole life and have been involved in training and mentoring pastors for many years. Pastors aren't perfect people, but they do share a commitment to serve

Jesus and others. I love their dedication, their hard work and their sacrifice. Pastors struggle with the same sins and difficulties others face. We are all still works in progress. People often see pastors as a step above others, closer to God and more spiritual. They think we have a wonderful life because others look up to us and admire us. But we face all that others face. Sometimes pastors have to deal with extra heartache because of their role with people. Satan often tries to use this to discourage us or get us to quit. If he can stop the leader of a church, he can affect all the church does and everyone in it. This blog is to help you better understand some things we pastors go through so you can better pray for us and support us.

It makes pastors sad to see people not follow Jesus and when Christians turn to sin instead of living for Jesus. It often bothers us more than it bothers them, because we know that not living for Jesus only brings misery.

As pastors, we mourn when marriages struggle and fail. Sometimes we are unable to help and that makes us feel like we have failed them. We see the pain the people go through and how it affects their children and grieve for them.

It is very sad to see young people grow up and make decisions that lead to sin and trouble. We try to tell them how important it is to follow Jesus but they think they know best and follow the world's ways instead. We feel bad for them and often think we should have been able to do more to lead them to follow Jesus.

When people sin and turn from Jesus, we need to carry out church discipline to warn them and others of the seriousness of their choices. If warning and talking with them doesn't change things, we must remove them from church membership. When I have had to do this, I felt like I failed as their pastor.

We think it is our fault if the church we are leading is struggling or not growing. When people leave our church, we blame ourselves. If we aren't bringing unbelievers to Jesus, we think we are doing something wrong or God isn't blessing us.

When people we know and love are sick, we pray for them, but if God doesn't heal them, we can think we let them down. If they die, we speak at their funerals, and our hearts are very heavy with grief. Doing a funeral for a person who isn't a Christian can be very hard because we don't have words of hope for the listeners and because we know they have gone to hell without Jesus.

Sometimes people gossip or complain about us. They criticize us to others. This is often inaccurate and unfair. Still, the talk hurts us and it is difficult to explain the truth. When the talk is about our wives or children it hurts even more.

As pastors, we have high expectations of ourselves so when we make a mistake, forget to do something, have a sermon or teach a lesson that doesn't go as well as we thought it would, we put the blame on ourselves. Even when things are going well and the people are pleased with us, we often think we could be doing better.

Many pastors struggle with loneliness for themselves and their families. It's sometimes hard to be a pastor or his family and have friendships like others have.

Pastors and their families also struggle with not having enough finances to meet their needs. This can be a great burden on pastors. We also feel we don't have enough time for everything that needs to be done and it is hard to not do everything we think needs doing.

In addition, we also struggle with sin in our own lives. We all have areas where we are weak, places where God is working to make us more like Jesus. Many times, we aren't satisfied with our prayer time and Bible study.

These are some of the burdens we carry as pastors. Know you aren't alone and that others struggle, too. Have fellowship with pastors near you so you can encourage and pray for each other. Remember that Jesus understands these things for He went through them Himself (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). Claim His promises for He says He will always be with us (Joshua 1:9), won't give us anything too hard for us without His help (1 Corinthians 10:13) and that His grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). (August 29, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 10:15 (Isaiah 52:7) How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

Ask God to make you more sensitive to the difficulties and struggles your pastor and his family face.

Pray for them specifically and daily.

Do all you can to thank, encourage and help them. You may feel unqualified, but any and all help is greatly appreciated.

BLOG 590: PREOCCUPATION WITH SPIRITUAL WARFARE?

One problem I notice in some people I counsel about spiritual warfare is that they become preoccupied with the enemy and their battle with him. It's all they think about. I know we must be alert to enemy attacks and work against us, but it is Jesus we must think about and concentrate on only Him. If the enemy can get us so focused on our battles with him that we lose sight of Jesus, he wins. Satan and demons want to be worshiped, they want to be recognized and feared. When we dread them, we give them what they want. Fear is like worship for then we see them as in control over our life and not God. Unfortunately, we often give them more credit than they are due.

Preoccupation with spiritual warfare and demons is wrong. Yet it can be a temptation, especially for those just learning about this for the first time. Spiritual warfare is an excellent tool when it is needed, but it isn't to be our only tool, nor our main tool. A carpenter needs many tools to do his work, no one will do it all. A saw is very important when it is needed. A hammer or screw driver will not do the same job. But a saw is not good at hammering or screwing a bolt. The same is true of farmers and doctors. It is true of Christians as well. We need to understand and become skillful at spiritual warfare, but we need to develop our use of our other disciplines as well. We need balance. Prayer, worship, Bible study and memorization, fasting, fellowship with other Christians and serving others are all important skills to develop. These help us keep our eyes on Jesus. Spiritual warfare should help us focus on Jesus, but all too often our attention is more about Satan and demons, not Jesus. We need to focus on our Savior, not our enemy.

Do you remember when Peter walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21)? He kept his eyes on Jesus and did fine. But then he looked at the waves around him and started sinking. So, he called to Jesus and looked to Jesus again and Jesus restored him. The storm didn't stop, the water was still there, but He looked to Jesus and was safe. That is what we must do as well. Don't focus on the problems or attacks but look at Jesus. Spend time reading the Bible and thinking about what you read. The book of Philippians is a good book to read to help keep your eyes on Jesus. So is John. Look for promises He makes to you and keep your eyes on Him. (September 5, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 14:29-31 Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Ask God to show you if you are giving too much attention and focus to Satan and demons. Do you fear them and what they can do, or do you trust in Jesus? Ask God to help you have a healthy balance in these things.

BLOG 591: PRAY LIKE PAUL PRAYED

We well know the importance of prayer, but at times we struggle with our own prayer life. Sometimes prayer can feel like throwing darts at a target while blindfolded. We throw our words heavenward not knowing if they've hit their target or not. Praying with someone who has a solid prayer life can be helpful, but isn't always possible. But what if you could pray with the Apostle Paul when you weren't sure what or how to pray? That would be very beneficial, but how can that be? We may not be able to sit down with Paul, but we do have his prayers recorded in the Bible and we can use them when we aren't sure how to pray or what to say. There is nothing magical or extra powerful about the words because Paul said them, but they can help guide and direct our words. Try reading and praying these prayers of Paul when you struggle with your own prayers. Say the verses in your own words and apply them to your circumstances. Take your time to apply Paul's prayers to your own life. Here are some samples:

1. Thanking God for others. Instead of just praying for needs of others, thank God for them and their impact in your life and the Kingdom. Philippians 1:3-6 and Romans 1:8-10 are good samples.

2. Salvation of others. Ask God to give you a burden for sharing your faith as well as opportunities to share. Paul prayed for these in Romans 10:1 and Philemon 5-7.

3. Others in need. Too often we pray what we feel is the solution to others' problems, and that usually means removing all difficulties. However, God often uses those very things to help them grow in their faith. Pray the problem, not the solution. Ask God to work in them no matter how He chooses to use their trials. That's how Paul prayed in Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:6-7 and 1 Thessalonians 3:13.

4. Spiritual blessing for self and others. We need God's joy, peace and guidance in life more than we need Him to solve all our problems so life is easy and perfect. Pray for these in other's lives as well as your own as Paul did in Colossians 1:9-14; Romans 15:13 and 1 Corinthians 16:23.

5. Protection and courage for self and others. Ask God to help you and others better know and understand Jesus and His plan. Samples from Paul include Colossians 4:2-4, Romans 15:30-33 and Ephesians 6:19-20).

6. Thank God for comfort and help. Many of Paul's prayers thanked God for His work in Paul's life, such as 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Ephesians 1:3.

7. Thank God for grace and mercy. We can't give enough thanks to God but we can always give more than we do. Follow Paul's prayers in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 and 1 Corinthians 1:4-9).

8. For holiness and guidance in life. Paul often prayed that he and others would live righteous lives of love and service. We can pray the same, as in Philippians 1:9-11; 2 Corinthians 13:7-9).

9. Victory over Satan. Ask God for strength and victory over Satan and evil men as Paul did in 2 Thessalonians 3:2-5.

As you read the Bible, be alert to prayers and make them your own. You can do an internet search for the prayers of Paul or just Bible prayers and find more. Remember, it's not the words we say but the heart attitude behind the words. Even when we don't know what to say, God knows our hearts. (September 12, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Take some time praying, asking God to help you better communicate with Him and thank Him for being willing listeners to all we say.

BLOG 592: WHEN DOUBT HELPS FAITH

I've written several blogs about doubt because I think it's something we as Christians don't discuss enough. We believe it is wrong so we pretend it doesn't exist, even though many of us, me included, deal with it from time to time. What is doubt? Is it a tool of Satan, a weakness of the flesh or a legitimate seeking after greater understanding? I think it can be any of them.

When life is difficult, and you pray for God to intervene, but it doesn't seem He does, do you begin to doubt? Do you wonder if He really loves you and cares? Do you ever wonder if He even knows what you are going through? When prayers aren't answered, do you begin to doubt the power of prayer? Or perhaps you doubt if your prayers are "good enough" to be answered? Wouldn't it be better if God gave us everything we wanted as soon as we wanted it so we would never doubt Him?

Faith consists of believing God exists, that He came to earth as Jesus to pay for our sins and that the Bible is the written record of God's absolutes for us today. Faith is trusting God cares about me individually, loves me, forgives me because I trust in Jesus and has a wonderful plan and purpose for my life.

But does having faith include believing I can have anything and everything I want as soon as I want it? Does it mean I know what is best for me? Can I assume that God always wants everything easy and perfect for me? And problems come, is it because God isn't able to help me or because I don't deserve His help? What do I do with these doubts? Do I pretend I don't have them so I seem like a good Christian?

Doubts need to be faced and worked through, not ignored. They are nothing to feel guilty about. Temptation is not sin, it's what we do with the temptation. The same is true of doubts. In fact, doubts can help us refocus our trust in God despite questions about what He is doing and why He is doing it. Unanswered prayer or questions about what God is doing (or not doing) are reminders to trust in God Himself, not just His actions. We put faith in Him because He is faithful to do what is right and best, not easiest for us. We put our faith in His proven character, how in His actions because we can't correctly evaluate them. It isn't His inability to change our circumstances or lack of love for us. He is always able to do anything, but He is not always willing. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were about to be thrown into the fiery furnace they affirmed that God was able to save them but He might not be willing to do so if He had other plans for them (Daniel 3:17).

Face your doubts and questions. Take them to God without fear or guilt. He is big enough to handle them. They don't surprise Him – He knows them anyway. Let Him use them to make your faith stronger. After all, faith isn't based on proof. It's the opposite – it means trusting when there is no proof (Hebrews 11:1).

You will have doubts. It's natural. You're human. Don't feel bad about having them or be discouraged when they come about. Submerge yourself in prayer and saturate your mind and spirit with uplifting Scriptures. Focus on all God has already done for you and what your life would be like without Him. He's been faithful so far; He will continue to be so in the future.

Having doubts does not diminish your faith or belief in God. In fact, they can make your belief in Him and His will for your life stronger. When a request you've submitted goes unanswered, take a moment and ask God if you're asking for the right thing. When things don't go your way, ask God to show you His way. Pray for God to reveal the root and the source of the doubt in your heart so you

know if you should rebuke it or trust God with it. If fear is involved, confess the fear and don't let it influence you. Ask God to put Scripture promises in your mind to correctly handle the doubt.

Again, it's okay to have doubts. It's a part of the journey and a part of growth as a Christian. (September 19, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Daniel 3:17-18 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

When do doubts most arise in your heart?

How closely are your doubts related to your fears?

How can you use your doubts to strengthen your faith?

BLOG 593: BEHIND TODAY'S SEXUAL CONFUSION

This blog is about one of those subjects where the Biblical world view and nonbiblical world view clash. The Bible's evaluation of the current sexual changes going on all around us is rejected by the world. In fact, anything that doesn't agree with the "anything goes" philosophy is called hatred. What about the great rise in homosexuality, transgender changes and male-female confusion in the last few years?

Satan is "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Other passages of Scripture call him "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), informing us "that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Therefore, it only makes sense to attribute the great social changes going on around us to his influence as well. They are totally against God's absolute truth as revealed in the Bible, they are based on self-centered desires for immediate pleasure but bring ultimate emptiness, they divide families and weaken the church and our country. They bring conflict between friends and confusion to many. These are all things Satan wants to accomplish.

I'm not saying there aren't other contributing social, cultural, medical and/or emotional factors as well, but I am saying it's obvious Satan is using them as part of his grand plan to turn people from God to his error and lies. I wouldn't say all those participating in what is happening today are under the control or influence of demons. I think many are influenced by their own sin nature, by peer pressure, confusion or a desire to rebel or are just lost seeking something to give their life meaning and purpose. But if we could see into the unseen spiritual world around us I believe we would see a strong demonic organization behind all aspects of what is happening today. God opened Elijah and his servants' eyes to see into this world (2 Kings 6:17; 19:35). The same was true with Daniel 10:11-16. John records many such scenes in the book of Revelation.

Understanding this can help us combat it in our lives and the lives of our family. First, we must not be swayed by the pressure put on us as Christians to accept and agree with their beliefs. We can sympathize with individuals, but never approve of their solutions. We must take a firm stand against anything now supported in the Bible. We must solidify our faith in what the Bible says and not compromise or make any exceptions.

Second, knowing the source behind much of this can help us know how to pray for those caught in its bondage. We can't ask God to force them to believe, but we can pray their minds would be open so they can clearly see the truth and make an objective free-will choice. We can pray to bind

the lies and deceptions that block the truth. We can offer God's truth to them without arguing. Our testimony of the change Jesus has made in our lives and the meaning and significance He offers is our best offense.

Third, we need to train our children, as well as new Christians, in the truth so they are solidly grounded in the absolute, verifiable certainty of the Bible. That is the duty of every parent, church and Christian.

Prayerfully consider these things. Ask God to lead you into truth and to give you wisdom as you apply His truth to your life and those around you. (September 26, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 3:14-17 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Who do you know who is caught up in the moral changes going on in the world today? What can you do to help them?

BLOG 594: SUCCESSFUL TRICKS OF SATAN TODAY

Satan's whole purpose is to oppose God and his people on earth. He is very good at deluding and defeating millions. Look at the world today and you'll see how successful he is. How does he do it? What's the secret of his accomplishment? Understanding how he works helps us better defend against those things in our life and family.

1. He convinces us he doesn't exist. "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist" is a line from the 1995 movie "The Usual Suspects." It is also a central theme of apologist and theologian C.S. Lewis' famous book, "The Screwtape Letters." The world, even many believers, don't believe he really exists. That allows him to work undetected, never getting blamed for what he does. People blame the evil around us on culture, the economy, poor parenting, even Christianity for pointing out sin, but never of the real source.

2. He lies. The Bible tells us that lying is fundamental to the corrupt, bankrupt character of the devil (John 8:44). He cannot tolerate truth. The only time he uses it is to cover for a deeper lie. His unbiblical world view, self-centered motives, selfish priorities, hatred, lust, fear and greed rule the world today. The ideas, values, goals and actions of unbelievers all come from him. Three times Jesus referred to Satan as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Other passages of Scripture call Satan "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), informing us "that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).

Additionally, we believe lies about ourselves, as the devil seeks not only to separate us from God but from one another. Low self-esteem abounds, leading to many different problems. Children are being bullied like never before, suicide rates abound and human cruelty seems to be at a frightening height in societies all around the globe.

3. He offers riches and status. Money, possessions, power, social position, pleasure and popularity are sought by most people today. These become idols, substitutes for God in people's lives. They dull the natural longing in people for real meaning and purpose in life, which only God can give. As substitutes, they fail for they ultimately bring emptiness, meaninglessness and hopelessness. Satan offered these things on Jesus when he tempted Him (Matthew 4:1-11) but

Jesus countered them with the truth of God's Word by saying "it is written...". They worked on Adam and Eve in Eden, though (Genesis 3:1-7).

To resist and have victory, we must understand how he works and be alert for it in our own lives (1 Peter 5:8-9). Also, we must stay close to Jesus and be growing in our faith so we can resist his tricks and traps (James 4:7). God promises victory if we follow Him (Isaiah 54:17). (October 3, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Which of Satan's tricks and traps are most successful against you?

What must you do to have better victory over them and him?

BLOG 595: SATAN'S GAME PLAN

It's much easier to defeat an opponent if you know their game plan. That's true in sports, business and warfare. Those following Jesus find themselves in a war with an enemy who is trying to destroy them. Unfortunately, many Christians live in sin and defeat, but they don't have to. God has revealed Satan's game plan to alert us. He also gives us His power to have victory. Let's make sure we understand what that game plan is.

1 John 2:16 reveals weapons Satan uses to attack and defeat us: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." This is the same 3-pronged attack Satan used on Eve (Genesis 3:1-7) and Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). He uses it on us today as well.

1. Cause a craving for physical gratification. People today are preoccupied with sex, drugs, alcohol, food or anything that brings physical pleasure. Eve was tempted to eat fruit which "was good for food" (Genesis 3:3b). Jesus was tempted with bread after fasting for 40 days (Matthew 4:3-4). God gives us good things to please us, but when we go outside God's intended purpose for these things, they become sin. *What temptations for food, drink, sex, etc. are most effective against you?*

2. Cause a desire to accumulate money & possessions. Satan tempted Eve by showing her what was "pleasing to the eye" (Genesis 3:6c). He showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and told Him He could have them all (Matthew 4:8-10). He still flashes the newest, biggest, flashiest possessions the world has to offer before us. He wants us to think we have to have them; we can't be happy until they are ours. But they are like drinking salt water. They don't bring satisfaction, just a desire for more. *What 'things' most tempt you? What do you feel you must have to be happy?*

3. Cause boastful pride, focusing on themselves. The final weapon of Satan's used against Eve and Jesus, and us, is focus on status and significance. Satan tempted Eve by promising knowledge that would make her like God (Genesis 3:4-5). He tempted Jesus to avoid the cross by jumping off the highest point of the temple and having angels save Him in front of all the watching people so they see how great he was (Matthew 4:5-7). Satan tempts us to elevate ourselves over others as well. We want to be noticed and recognized, seen as successful and important and have others impressed with us. We don't want to yield, submit, serve, apologize or humble ourselves. That's all pride. *Where is your biggest battle with pride? Under what circumstances do you most often give in? What must you do to have victory?*

It's not a question of "if" Satan will tempt you, but "when" and "how." It will happen. Knowing his game plan for defeating you gives you an advantage in being able to block his attacks. (October 10, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 John 2:14-15 *I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.*

Take a moment to write down the temptations to which you are most vulnerable. Under each write what you need to do to block the attack.

BLOG 596: ANGEL ALLIES

When you enter a fight, it's important to know who is on your side. Who can you count on? Who has your back? A country must know who its allies are before entering a war. We must know who is on our side when we battle Satan and his demons.

The Greek word for 'angel' ('angelos') means "messenger." Actually, the word is just transliterated in our Bibles (English letters replace Greek letters but the word is the same). Were it translated into English we would have the word "messenger" every time 'angel' appears. That is basically their function -- messengers (servants) of God. They are God's servants who help God's people (Hebrews 1:14). Individual angels seem assigned to children and believers (Acts 12:12) to help them in special ways. God could use His sovereign power to do things such as prevent an automobile accident or have a child fall safely and not be hurt, or similar actions, but usually He has His angels do that work. They protect God's people (Psalm 34:7; 91:12; Matthew 18:10). They bring answers to prayers (Acts 12:7), although sometimes demons oppose them and the answers are delayed (Daniel 10:10-21). They minister to our physical, spiritual and emotional needs (Hebrews 1:14). Angels watch and learn from believers (1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Timothy 3:16). They encourage us in danger (Acts 27:23-24). They even help in evangelism (Luke 15:10; Acts 8:26). They care for God's people when they die (Luke 16:22; Jude 9). They fight against demons (Revelation 12). They watch God's children to learn about God's grace (1 Peter 1:12).

The Bible identifies 4 different types of angels. **Seraphim** (Isaiah 6:2-3; Ezekiel 1:27) have a fiery appearance because they are usually associated with the Presence of God. **Cherubim** (Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:18-22; Hebrews 9:5) are represented with wings, feet, hands and often more than one face (Ezekiel 41:18; 10:21). They guard sacred things (the tree of life in Genesis 3:24; the Ark of the Covenant in 1 Samuel 4:4). **Archangels** are the highest created beings, angels of the greatest power and majesty. Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12) was an archangel. Michael (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 9) and Gabriel (Daniel 8:15-26; 9:21-27; Luke 1:11-38). Michael and Gabriel are warrior angels (Revelation 12:7) who do battle (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1). Gabriel seems to be in charge of the care of the Jews. Other angels exist in various levels of authority and function under these (Ephesians 6:12). God has angels organized in a military-like manner with a chain-of-command from 'generals' to 'privates.'

Angels are not to be communicated with, ordered around, or in any way contacted by us. They do not steal any of God's glory. We aren't in any way to focus on them or worship them (Revelation 19:10). All the credit and glory all go to Him (Revelation 4:11; 5:9-11). All the attention is His. In the Bible when someone tried to give them credit they passed it on to God. We aren't to communicate with them, but we can ask God to send them to do various things that need doing. And yes, they do manifest at times. There are many cases in the Bible. Sometimes they manifest as spiritual beings. I think young children can see or sense them quite more readily than adults. They also manifest as people and help us without us knowing they are angels. Hebrews 13:2 talks about this. Angels are always present around us, especially when we gather with other believers in Jesus' name. However, we never can see them unless God opens our eyes in a special way (2 Kings 6:17). It's quite likely you have seen angels, but in appearance as people (Hebrews 13:2) and therefore not recognized as

an angel. That stranger who just happens to show up at the right time to provide help or assistance, whom we called an 'angel,' might well have been one! (October 17, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 13:23 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

Do you know of any time angels assisted you in any way? When I survive a bad fall or a near car accident unhurt, I thank God for His angels who protected me. Do you recognize their help in your life?

BLOG 597: CAN SATAN PUT THOUGHTS IN YOUR MIND?

Can God read our thoughts? He certainly can! He not only knows our thoughts but also the intentions of our hearts (Genesis 6:5; Proverbs 12:5). What about Satan? Does he know our thoughts? Can he put thoughts into our minds? Is it ever true that "the Devil made me do it"?

Yes, Satan can and he does put sinful thoughts in our minds. Who has not had an unwelcome thought suddenly manifest in their mind when you weren't thinking about like it. That is from Satan's demons.

Sometimes he may put desires for something sinful directly into our hearts, followed by thoughts that justify those sinful desires. Other time he may do the reverse by putting deceptive thoughts in our minds that lead to sinful desires.

We see several examples of this in Scripture. During the Last Supper, we read that Satan had already put into Judas' heart to betray Jesus (John 13:2). Judas was a thief taking money out of the disciples' money bag (John 12:6). He was deceptive, greedy and a liar. He didn't commit to Jesus because He wasn't the kind of Messiah Judas wanted to follow. So, Satan intensified and directed Judas' own sinful thoughts to the point where he was open to the idea of betraying Jesus. A lesson for us is that our own unconfessed sinfulness is like an invitation, an open door to demons to magnify and add to those thoughts. Paul refers to this in Ephesians 4:26-27 when he warns that unconfessed anger gives Satan an opportunity to develop those thoughts in us. Sinfully hating someone is like a welcome mat for Satan. And it works the other way around as well. When demons beckon us to sin with deceptive thoughts or desires, our own sin nature kicks in and makes those

We don't know exactly how Satan interacts with our own sinful nature to do his ugly work. Our own sinfulness is like an invitation, like a welcome mat or an open door to Satan. Paul says in Ephesians 4:26-27: "*Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.*" In other words, sinfully holding a grudge is like a welcome mat put out for Satan. And it works the other way around. When Satan beckons us to sin with deceptive thoughts or desires, our own sinful nature kicks in and makes those inner impulses more attractive.

When Ananias and Sapphira, early church believers, decided to lie to the apostles in order to keep back part of their pledged money, Peter asked why they allowed Satan to fill their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). They had greedy thoughts about how to keep some money while still getting credit for giving it all. They came up with a plan and carried it out. The idea may have originated in their mind and then Satan made it seem more desirable. Or perhaps, knowing they had a love of money and public recognition, Satan put an idea about how they could have both in their mind. However, it came about, the results were tragic (Acts 5:5, 10).

Another example is how Satan motivated King David to take a census in Israel against God's will. "Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:1). He put the thought in David's mind, and he made the thought look like military wisdom when it was, in fact, distrust in God. Perhaps there was some pride in David as the vast number of people he ruled and

Satan built on that. Now matter Satan's influence, David was still responsible and was disciplined for it (1 Chronicles 21:1-30).

Jesus says Satan is a liar, a deceiver and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). His goal is to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9). He lies, he deceives, he uses half-truths – anything to influence people against trusting and obeying God. He snares people with his lies (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Only the truth sets us free (John 8:32). We stay free from this by knowing and following the truth of God's Word (Ephesians 6:11-18).

So yes, Satan can put thoughts into our minds. He knows our thoughts and can try to manipulate them for his purpose. We are still 100% responsible for our thoughts and actions. Satan cannot force us against our will, we yield our free will to the lie and follow it. That's why it is so important to take captive every thought that comes into our mind, separating the true from the false. *"We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). That means we don't just go with every thought that pops into our mind. We make sure it lines up with the truth of God's Word. We stay alert to anything that may come from the flesh or the enemy and not from God. We control our thoughts, we don't them control us. We make sure every thought is good and godly: *"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things"* (Philippians 4:8).

Any thought that is not what Jesus would have must be rejected. Ask God to remove it and fill you with His truth and His thoughts only. Don't fear Satan or his attacks. Just be aware they can happen and keep your eyes on Jesus. Satan is a defeated foe (1 John 4:4) so don't fear him.

2 Corinthians 11:3 I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Where do you think demons may be trying to influence you with thoughts that are not from God? What should you do whenever you realize what is happening?

BLOG 598: USING WORSHIP AS A SPIRITUAL WARFARE WEAPON

Sometimes it seems life is just a series of battles. Our victory comes through Jesus alone. That means we must keep our focus on Him, trust in Him and lean on His for victory. Sometimes that can seem hard. How can we keep our eyes on Jesus when there are confusing, painful or defeating things going on in life? One of the best ways is to worship Jesus. We can keep our focus on Him by praising and thanking Him. Demons hate to hear Jesus worshipped, so when we worship, we weaken their power over us.

We know the name of Jesus is the greatest name ever. Praise the name of Jesus in prayer and in song. Thank Him that when He is for us no one can stand against us (Romans 8:31). Worship him because His name is above every name in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:21) and because He has all power and authority (Matthew 28:18). When you say His name aloud, through praise or a call for help, you are enlisting all of heaven's armies, which respond to the beck and call of Jesus and His loved ones (Psalm 18:6-19, Romans 10:13).

Worshipping when going through trials, temptations and deep struggles affirms our trust in God. We are commanded to give thanks in ALL circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18), even disappointment, heartache pain and seeming defeat. As those are often times when we are at our weakest, and most prone to spiritual attack, our praise-in-all-things mentality will turn our focus back to Jesus. Worshipping Jesus will help weaken and ultimately defeat attacks of the enemy against us.

If you're like Job, and you're being attacked in spite of your upright living, then obey 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and thank Him that He is stronger than any forces that will ever come against you. Thank Him for how the trial or attack is developing you spiritually and perfecting and maturing your faith (James 1:2-4). As you keep a heart of praise, which is the essence of worship, you are abiding in Him. Psalm 22:3 says God inhabits the praises of His people or is enthroned in our praises. When God is inhabiting the person of praise, Satan's attacks can irritate but not penetrate. Keep your heart and mind set on thanking Him and you will be fighting spiritual attacks with a weapon of praise.

Saying and praying Jesus' name and worshipping Him in prayer is effective in spiritual warfare. It can be very effective to sing your worship as well. All of Scripture's Psalms (which literally mean "songs") were originally set to music and meant to be sung. Compose your own tune in your head as you sing the Bible's Psalms aloud or sing some other New Testament passages. You can sing any Christian hymns or songs you know, especially ones that lift up Jesus. Play recorded music on the radio or internet and sing along. Singing or praying Scripture verses has the double benefit of standing on the truths of God's Word but also helping you form your prayer and worship in a good way.

As you sing the scriptures, remind yourself of who you are in God's eyes. For example, you are His beloved (Jeremiah 31:3), you are His friend (John 15:13-15), you are His adopted child (Romans 8:15), you are His masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10). When you quote scripture back to Satan, he knows that scripture, and he trembles – and backs off – at the power of the written word of God. That's what Jesus did when He was tempted after fasting 40 days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). That's our sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12).

Ephesians 6:11-12 "Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Take a few minutes now to praise God. Try to keep an attitude of praise in your heart all day.

BLOG 599: USING FASTING AS A SPIRITUAL WARFARE WEAPON

Just as a general equips his soldiers with weapons needed to defeat their enemies, so God provides His followers with the weapons needed to have victory in the Christian life. We are very familiar with such weapons as prayer, worship, use of Scripture and fellowship with other believers. But there is one tool we neglect to use and that is fasting.

Christian fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. A person may fast for health purposes, and while this can be a good thing, it's not fasting as described in Scripture (although health benefits can result from Christian fasting). While it can be appropriate to speak of fasting from other things besides food—such as your phone, TV, etc.—technically, the Bible uses the term only in reference to abstinence from food.

Fasting can involve abstaining from food and fluids, or just from food. Most fasting includes drinking water. For medical reasons, some are unable to do this. Fasting can then be adjusted to a "partial" fast. This involves a limitation of the diet but not abstention from all food.

Fasting is expected of the believer. It is not optional, it is required. Jesus says in Matthew 6:16-17: "And when you fast ... But when you fast . . ." He never says "if." In the same passage Jesus talks about "when" we give (Matthew 6:1-2) or "when" we pray (Matthew 16:5-7). We use those passages to teach about giving and praying, but often the passage about fasting is omitted.

The early church understood the importance of fasting and it was a part of their spiritual life (Acts 9:9; 13:2; 14:23).

Please understand that there is nothing magical or mystical about fasting. We don't gain points with God Him by putting ourselves through hunger. Fasting is not a mere test of endurance, nor is it a way of gaining righteousness. God is not impressed by how much we suffer. The only suffering that ever impressed Him was that of Jesus on the cross.

Fasting is God's idea. There are unique blessings we can receive only through fasting. Fasting must be done for a purpose other than just going hungry. You must know your purpose before you fast.

So, here's what fasting looks like *without* a biblical purpose: your headaches, or your stomach growls, and you think, "*I'm hungry! Oh, wait; I'm hungry because I'm fasting today.*" If your next action is to look at the time, and your next thought is, "*How long until this is over?*" then you're doing it wrong. There's no biblical purpose in that. Your purpose is merely to endure it. And it's probably just a miserable, self-centered experience.

With a biblical fast, whenever you realize that you are hungry and remember you are fasting, you remember the biblical purpose for your fast and act on it. For example, if your purpose is to pray for someone's salvation, every time you get hungry, your hunger prompts you to pray for that person's salvation. Or your purpose may be to have victory over a certain temptation by the enemy.

Fasting can help sharpen our focus. It can be a way of showing God and Satan that we want God's will more than anything, even something as basic as food. Eating dulls our senses, but going without can sharpen our focus on what is really most important to us. Also, fasting can free up more time for prayer in our busy and overloaded days. Hunger becomes a means to an end (a reminder to pray) and not an end in itself. (For more information on fasting write me at Jerry@Schmoyer.net and I will send you a series of blogs I wrote on fasting. They explain the what, when, why, where and how of fasting.)

Ezra 8:21 I proclaimed a fast by the Ahava River, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask Him for a safe journey for us, our children, and all our possessions.

When is the last time you fasted so you could better focus your prayers on something?

Why don't you focus more than you do?

Pray and ask God if there is anything you need to fast and pray about. If there is, ask Him how long you are to fast (start with very short fasts and build up to fasts of multiple days).

BLOG 600: SPIRITUAL IDENTITY THEFT (How God Sees You – 1)

We hear a lot about identity theft today. Much time and money are spent protecting our identity so no one steals it. Our identity is ours and we don't want anyone else using it. Unfortunately, we often aren't as careful with our spirituality identity. Sometimes we let Satan come along and steal our identity, replacing it with one of his making. He lies to us about how God sees us and who we are in Him, like he did to Eve. When we reject our real identity in Christ and accept a false version, we open ourselves to many problems and sins. It's not that our identity is stolen, it's more like we just give it away! Why would anyone willingly do that?

When we aren't aware of our true identity as a Christian, we settle for something far less. We focus on our sins, failures and weaknesses. We feel defeated, joyless and hopeless. Our focus is on

ourselves and our inadequacies and faults instead of on Jesus and all He has done for us. This is just what Satan wants for us.

Just what is our true identity in God's sight, the "New Creation" He has formed when we gave our hearts and lives to Him? Read the following carefully. Write out verses that speak to you. Hang them up where you will see them. Memorize them so they are always with you. That's the best way to keep Satan from stealing your identity.

God chose you before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). You are more important to Him than the creation of the universe because He made you first. Then He created the universe just so you'd have a wonderful place to live and you'd see how great He is.

Your sins are gone forever (Colossians 1:14). Our new identity is as "Saints" (Ephesians 1:1, etc.) because we are at this very moment seen as perfect in His sight. When we do sin, all we have to do is admit it to Him and the sin is completely and forever removed (1 John 1:9). What's more, we will never be judged for any sin we have ever committed or ever will commit. Romans 8:1-2 promises "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*" Romans 8 concludes with the same truth (31-34). "*What, then, shall we say in response to this? 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? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*"

You will never lose your salvation. You can live in the confidence that your salvation is secure and eternal. Learn to see yourself as a blood-bought believer who sins are forever removed. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 "*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*" You will live with Him in heaven forever. Ephesians 2:6 "*God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,*" Philippians 3:20 "*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*"

Think of these three when tempted to be down on yourself. Remember the saying, "When Satan reminds you about your past, remind him about his future!" (October 29, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

How healthy is your spiritual identity?

Where do you most struggle with seeing yourself as God sees you?

Which of these truths that were presented above do you need most right now? Write out the Bible verses and carry them with you. Read them whenever your true identity falters. Memorize them.

BLOG 601: EAGLES LIVING LIKE CHICKENS (How God Sees Us – 2)

One day a farmer found an eagle egg and put it with his chickens who hatched and raised it. The baby eagle walked, ate and acted like the other chickens. It never tried to fly. It took its identity from those around him and never saw himself as the regal creature he really was. Unfortunately, that is true of many Christians today as well. Satan does not want us to identify ourselves as children of

God. He wants us to scratch around in the dirt and live a listless life that doesn't count for God's Kingdom. But that's not who God made us to be. In the previous blog we looked at what our true identity in Jesus really is. We must understand and focus on who we are in God's sight, not as the world sees us or as we often see ourselves. Here are some more facts about our new spiritual identity.

You are both born into and adopted into God's family. Which would be better: to be born into a family where you are truly one with the others or to be adopted where you were actually and purposefully chosen to be part of the family? As a Christian, you are born into God's family and therefore eternally chosen and united with Him (Ephesians 1:4). You are also willingly adopted into His family by the One who knows absolutely everything about you. John 1:12 *"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* Ephesians 1:5 *"He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." You have the security that comes from being in His family by birth as well as the assurance of knowing you were wanted and chosen despite your faults and sins.*

God calls you His friend. Just being in a family doesn't mean you always get along with those who gave you birth or adopted you, but with God we have assurance we are always loved and wanted. He calls us His friend. John 15:15 *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* God doesn't just tolerate you or put up with you – He enjoys you and initiates a friendship with you! What could be better than having the God of the universe call you His friend!

Because you are part of God's family, you are also part of the family of believers. You are not alone, unloved, rejected, overlooked or unimportant. Because God is your Father and Jesus your elder Brother, all other believers are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You are not alone. You belong. You must see yourself as part of the Body of the Redeemed, the most special group of people in the world! 1 Corinthians 12:27 *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."* You belong. You are equal to all the others. You are special and important.

You are important enough to have God's immediate attention any time you want. In the Old Testament, the Jews could only enter God's Presence through the High Priest, and that was only one day a year, Yom Kippur, and was done with fear of rejection and death. Now you can talk to Him any time you want without fear of rejection. That's how special you are to Him. Ephesians 2:18 *"For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."* Ephesians 3:12 *"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."* You may not be able to talk to the president of the USA, but you can talk to the Creator of the universe any time you want!

Add these to the truths in the last blog and keep them written down somewhere where you can easily see them. When Satan attacks your self-image, remember how God sees you. That's who you really are! You are the person God created and sees when He looks at you! (November 6, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Have you thought about your spiritual identity during the past week?

Where have you found your greatest struggles?

Which of these truths that were presented above do you need most right now? Write out the Bible verses and carry them with you. Read them whenever your true identity falters. Memorize them.

BLOG 602: THE PRINCE WHO LIVED LIKE A PAUPER (How God Sees Us – 3)

A kind, benevolent king had a son whom he loved dearly. But the son didn't feel he deserved his father's love. He could have lived a fine life as the King's son, but he rejected it because he assumed he was unworthy. The king tried to convince him that his worth came because he was the king's son and had nothing to do with what he could or couldn't do. Yet the son spent his life in poverty and want. He struggled, suffered and experienced much misery because he refused to see himself as a special child of the king.

Many Christians are that way as well. We don't see ourselves as God sees us. We identify ourselves with those who aren't part of the royal family because we think that is all we deserve. Satan loves that and feeds us lies to keep us in defeat and discouragement. The last two blogs have shown how God sees us and what we have in Him. Read them carefully and apply them to your own life. It will help you walk in victory instead of defeat. Add these privileges to the list as well.

You are unconditionally and eternally loved by God. You are not just a casual acquaintance; you are the object of His full love now and forever. Romans 8:35-39 *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* It doesn't matter if you 'feel' loved or loveable or not – He loves you. It doesn't matter if you can't do anything to earn or deserve it – He loves you. It doesn't matter if you can never pay Him back – He loves you. And there's no way He will ever stop! There is nothing you can do to make Him love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make Him love you less!

You have God's peace. Before salvation you were God's enmity because of sin. You were a member of Satan's army. When your sin was forgiven the enmity was removed and you are now at peace with God. Romans 5:1 *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* In addition, you have peace from God that allows you to have an attitude of trust instead of fear of the future. You also have peace from God (Colossians 3:15). Philippians 4:7 *"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and part of your new identity instead of fear, anxiety, stress or hopelessness (Galatians 5:22-23).

You are under grace, not law. All God's dealings with you are by grace. You don't have to repay Him, make anything up to Him, serve out of fear or ever doubt where you stand with Him. He freely gives you grace for every need in your life (2 Corinthians 12:9). Hebrews 4:16 *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

Your weakness is replaced by power. You are not helpless and weak, but are empowered by God to do anything and everything He requires of you. Acts 1:8 *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Philippians 4:13 *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

What a wonderful privileged position we have because we are God's children. Sometimes it may seem hard to believe all this is true of us, but that's the enemy trying to replace our joy and peace with guilt and fear. Your Father loves you unconditionally and accepts you totally. Accept His love and bask in it. (November 13, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Has your spiritual identity been improving over the last few weeks?

What have you been learning about yourself from these blogs?

Which of these truths that were presented above do you need most right now? Write out the Bible verses and carry them with you. Read them whenever your true identity falters. Memorize them.

BLOG 603: WHAT DO YOU SEE IN YOUR MIRROR? (How God Sees Us – 4)

If you were asked how to describe yourself, what would you say? Would you focus on your appearance? Or perhaps your skills and abilities? Would you refer to your accomplishments? Or would you downplay your strengths and better qualities and focus more on your struggles and weaknesses? When you look in a mirror, what do you see? God sees us as worthy of His death to pay for our sin. He values us more than we can imagine. We can't allow Satan to steal our identity in Christ and replace it with lies that defeat and discourage us. This current series of blogs is to help you see yourself as Jesus sees you. This is your real identity in Christ. This is the 4th and last in a series of blogs about our real identity in Christ. Write down and memorize these verses so you won't forget who that person in your mirror really is.

You have victory over Satan and demons. They use fear to try to control and defeat us, but our identity in Jesus assures us of victory over them because He is greater than they are (1 John 4:4). You must fight using the weapons God has provided (Ephesians 6:10-18). Don't see yourself as a helpless victim, remember you are able to resist and overcome them in God's strength. Colossians 1:13 *"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,"* Luke 10:18-20 *"He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* Don't wonder if you will ever win – you are guaranteed victory. In fact, it is already yours!

You not only are freed from the control of Satan; you are also freed from the control of sin. That doesn't mean there won't be battles to overcome temptation and sin so you can live in the victory that is provided. You can still choose to sin, but you are no longer its helpless victim. Your identity is no longer that of a helpless victim but of a victorious overcomer. 2 Corinthians 5:17 *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* Romans 6:2 *"By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* Galatians 2:20 *"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."*

You have God's wisdom at your disposal. You are not ignorant of how God sees you. Don't be a victim of every lie that comes along. You have access to the mind of God. 1 Corinthians 2:16 *"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.* God will lead and direct you as a parent does a child in need. He will give wisdom and guidance. Trust Him for it.

God Himself lives within you. It's very hard to imagine that the triune God, creator and sustainer of the whole universe, actually and truly lives inside you. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body."* 1 Corinthians 3:16 *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"* Wouldn't it be great if Jesus came to earth every few years and spent a week in Israel so you could travel there and be part of a crowd of millions who could actually see Him from a distance? If that sounds good, how much greater is it that He is here on earth 24-7 living inside of you? Make sure you include that important truth in your self-identity. When you see other Christians, remember that about them as well.

Remember these things. Learn to see yourself as God sees you. Don't deny it, that is like calling Him a liar. Rest in His love and acceptance. Don't let Satan rob you of the blessings you have because you are a child of God. (November 20, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Has your spiritual identity been improving during the past month?

Which of these truths that were presented in these blogs do you need most right now? Write out the Bible verses and carry them with you. Read them whenever your true identity falters. Memorize them.

BLOG 604: WOULD GOD EVER SEND A DEMON TO ATTACK SOMEONE?

Would God ever send a demon to attack a person? You might think, "Of course not! He wants us free from demons, He'd never send a demon to torment anyone!" If you thought that, you'd be wrong. 1 Samuel 16:14 says, "*The Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him*" (see also 1 Samuel 16;15-16, 23; 18:10; 19:9). Did God really do that? Why would He do such a thing?

First of all, He really did it. The demon "from the Lord" was allowed to attack and harass Saul. Saul started out following God, but then he disobeyed several times (1 Samuel 13:1-14; 15:1-35). As a result, God removed His Holy Spirit and allowed a demon to do what demons love to do - attack and bring misery. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). Sin has consequences, and for Saul part of his was that God stopped protecting him from demonic attacks. God allowed them to do what they always want to do.

God allowed this not just so Saul would suffer the consequences of his sin, but also because it would bring David into Saul's life and ultimately become king instead of Saul. Only soothing music could bring Saul some relief from the demonic attacks he suffered, and David could play such music (1 Samuel 16:15-23).

This demon was allowed to come and go, attacking Saul and tormenting him. Saul opened the door by his disobedience, and God withdrew His protection. The demon came "from" God. But God overruled everything and used it for His good. The torment was allowed to cause Saul to turn back to God (which didn't happen) as well as bring David into the court and set him up to kill Goliath and ultimately become king. God uses everything for His purpose, even demons (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). We can clearly see that truth in the life of Job.

Saul isn't the only example in the Bible of God allowing demonic attack as a consequence of sin but using it to give the person an opportunity to repent and turn back to God. God also used it as a warning to others. We also see this in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and the Corinthian believer who was involved with incest and adultery (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was demonic torment that God didn't stop so Paul would learn to rely on God's grace and power (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Jesus used demons to show how great He was by defeating them and casting them out of people, even when there were 2,000 or more in one person (Mark 5:1-13).

It is no different today. God allows demons to work against people today so they will turn to Him for victory and see His power and might. He uses them for our growth and His glory (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). They can only do what He allows (Job 1:12; 2:6). God is in sovereign control over them.

If you feel you are being attacked, ask God to show you why that is happening. Is it a result of sin in your life that God wants you to confess? Are you in any way being disobedient to Him? Does

He want you to see His power and glorify Him as He brings you victory? This isn't always done by removing the demons. It could be, like with Paul, by giving you the grace you need to bear up under the attacks (2 Corinthians 12:7). It could be He wants you to trust Him and stay faithful no matter what happens - like Job did. (November 27, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 12:7–10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, 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.

What are some of the most common ways that Satan and his forces attack you?

What have your learned from past battles and victories?

What could He be trying to teach you from what you are facing today?

BLOG 605: THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING TEMPTATION

Temptation. We all face it. We know what it is – the desire to do something we shouldn't do. Satan fills our heart with lies (Acts 5:3). He is called the “tempter” (1 Thessalonians 3:5). But is that all there is to it? Can't we go a level deeper and better understand what is happening so we can be more alert to it and be better able to overcome it? Let's look at two classic cases of temptation in the Bible as see what we can glean from them.

1 John 2:16 says most temptations fall into one of three categories: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Eve's temptation in Eden (Genesis 3) and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4) give us insight into the tactics Satan used in the past and still uses today – and quite successfully as well.

In Satan's **first temptation** of Jesus, he appealed to the **lust of the flesh**. Jesus was very hungry, and Satan tempted Him to use His power to make bread for Himself. Jesus resisted the temptation, but the encounter shows how Satan works. He exploits our physical weaknesses and picks on them. He knows the weak places in our flesh and looks for opportunities to stir sinful passions inside our hearts. He takes a legitimate need in our life (food for Jesus) and tries to get him to meet that need in an illegitimate way (make bread out of stones). Think of the biggest temptations you struggle with. What legitimate need is behind them? How are you tempted to meet this need in a way that isn't God's way for you?

When Satan tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, he suggested to her that the Lord was keeping something beneficial from her (Genesis 3:6). When he tempts us with the lust of the flesh, he points to a natural desire and suggests that we should meet it in our own selfish way. Eve's natural desire for food was not wrong, but Satan exploited it. That desire became sin when she fulfilled it in an ungodly way. Sexual immorality begins with a natural desire for intimacy. But if we have not allowed Jesus to become a greater passion, the tempter may convince us that we must meet this need our own way. The same is true with the lust for food, or money, or possessions, or pleasure or anything else for which we lust.

The **second way Satan tempts us** is through the **lust of the eyes**. Eve's eyes told her something about the fruit that conflicted with what God had said about it. Eve's eyes rebelled against

God's commandment and "saw that it was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes" (Genesis 3:6).

Our eyes play a major role in our decision-making. We see something we want, and our flesh agrees that we must have it. In this age of visual overstimulation, our eyes take in millions of bits of information through the day, and, unless we filter that information through a pure heart (Matthew 5:8; Psalm 24:4), our eyes will lead us into sin. That's exactly what happened with Samson (Judges 14:1-3).

With Jesus, Satan showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and offered to give them all to Him. That was why He came to earth, so what was wrong with the offer? Jesus wouldn't have to go to the cross, thus there would be no redemption for anyone ever. Jesus saw the kingdoms, but again defeated Satan's lies with the truth of God's Word (Luke 4:8; Deuteronomy 6:13). Despite what His eyes saw, He knew God's Word and was committed to follow it. Always quote God's Word when tempted. It resets truth in your mind and heart. It is our sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) and our only way to victory.

Satan's **third temptation**, to Jesus and to Eve, **was to pride**. To Eve he promised more wisdom. Her ego wanted that more than she wanted to serve God, so she gave in. She wanted to make her own decisions, not always be told what to do by God! When we are more concerned with what others think of us than what God thinks, we are giving in to self-centeredness and pride.

Satan gave Jesus an opportunity to "show off" how great He was and prove before all that He was the Son of God (Luke 4:9-11). If He threw Himself off the highest part of the temple and angels came to catch Him, everyone would be impressed and see Him as Messiah God, but again without the cross (Luke 4:12; Deuteronomy 6:16).

These are the main ways Satan tempts us: the lust of our flesh, things we see and want, and through our pride and self-centeredness. We aren't unaware of his schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). We know he pretends to be an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) when he is really darkness. He tries to make evil look good, and good look unappealing. He uses false guilt to manipulate us, he knows our weaknesses and how to exploit them, and he twists Scripture like he did with Eve.

We don't have to give in. God is greater (1 John 4:4). If we keep our faith in God and His Word we will extinguish whatever lies he sends our way (Ephesians 6:16). Satan may tempt us through the lust of the flesh, but we "do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). Satan may tempt us through the lust of the eyes, but our prayer is "Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word" (Psalm 119:37). Satan may tempt us through the pride of life, but we must humble ourselves continually before the Lord (1 Peter 5:6; James 4:10). (December 4, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

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—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

When are you the most susceptible to temptation?

Which of the three categories mentioned in the blog bring the strongest temptations to you?

What must you do to have victory over them?

What are some specific verses you can use to keep the truth in your mind? Write them down now and carry them with you. Read them throughout the day.

BLOG 606: DOES SATAN ALWAYS NEED PERMISSION TO ATTACK?

It can be comforting to know that Satan needs to get God's permission before attacking us, as Job 1 and 2 states. God protected Job so when Satan tried to attack he couldn't, thus Satan asked God to remove the "hedge" God had put around him (Job 1:10). And God did.

That's not the only time Scripture speaks of this. In Luke 22:31-32 Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Clearly in this case Satan had asked God's permission to test Peter and the other disciples. Jesus tells Peter that He has prayed specifically for him so that Peter's faith would not fail and so that Peter can strengthen the other disciples when the test was over. The implication is that Peter and the rest would be sifted in whatever way Satan intended. So, God allowed opposition to His disciples, within limits, but He had a higher purpose in mind—the strengthening of them all.

Does that mean that every time we are attacked it is because God has removed His protection and allowed Satan and his forces to strike at us? God is in sovereign control of everything and puts limits on all His creation (Job 38:11). God has limits and boundaries around Satan, so when he "prowls around like a roaring lion" there are restrictions to his actions. If there weren't, I'm sure he would have every Christian dead. Yet God protects us with His power, His Spirit and His angels. So why does He allow demons to attack us at all? Why not protect us from every attack and temptation?

I covered this pretty thoroughly in a previous blog, "Why Does God Allow Demons to Attack us?" He does it so we will grow in our faith as we learn how to fight for victory. He also does it so we have opportunities to trust Him and glorify Him as we see Him work in and through us. He does it because He honors our free will. He doesn't force us to sin, neither does He force us to not sin. It is our choice to make, and when we make the choice He steps in and helps us have victory over the temptation, oppression or demonic attacks.

God is much greater than Satan (1 John 4:4). God is in sovereign control of everything (Romans 8:28-39). God knows all about every part of our lives, even the very hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7). God loves us totally and unconditionally (John 14:16). Therefore, we can have assurance that His protection of Job and Peter aren't exceptions but are the rule. We can confidently say that all our trials are "Father filtered."

There are some important implications from that. That means that we can't ever say that what we are going through is "too much" because God promises that can never be the case (1 Corinthians 10:13). We can have victory no matter what we face. God is always acutely aware of what is going on in our lives. It also means there is always a good reason for everything we face, if we realize it or not. Additionally, we can never blame God for what we face. It is never His fault (James 1:13). Yes, Satan always needs approval to attack. (December 11, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Colossians 1:16–17 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

Do you ever feel that what you are facing is too much for you to handle?

Do you feel God isn't aware of what is happening in your life, or that He doesn't care?

What truths should you turn to in order to overcome these lies?

BLOG 607: WHY DOESN'T GOD KEEP US FROM SATAN'S DECEPTION?

We know God wants everyone to come to Him (2 Peter 3:9), but that Satan uses lies and deception to keep them in sin (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4). However, does Satan really have the ability to get us to do the opposite of what we want? Or is his deception based on what we really want to believe and do anyway, and he just helps us move in the direction we have already chosen?

It's not like we need a high level of intelligence or knowledge to come to Jesus for salvation (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 1:20,26). The truth is that the more 'intelligent' in the world's way of seeing life people seem to be, the further from God they become.

The truth of the matter is that we choose what we want to believe rather than what we should believe, even in the face of strong evidence to the contrary (Luke 16:31). Many saw Jesus' miracles yet rejected Him and "would not believe" (John 12:37). Their rejection was willful, by their own free choice.

Eve giving in to sin is the earliest example of how spiritual deception works. When the serpent asked her, "Did God really say . . . ?" Eve responded by quoting what God had said, although she added to the command (Genesis 3:1–3). She knew what to do and what not to do. The serpent then tempted her with what she could gain by eating from the tree (Genesis 3:4–5), and she noticed other attractive aspects of the fruit (Genesis 3:6). Eve was lied to, and the serpent was cunning (2 Corinthians 11:3), but she ultimately chose to disobey God, even though she knew His commandment.

Then when confronted by God, she excused her disobedience by saying "the serpent deceived me" (Genesis 3:13). The Hebrew word translated "deceived" implies trickery and craftiness. Yes, she was fooled, but still had a choice in the matter. She chose to reject God's truth for the lies of the enemy, preferring to believe them instead of God. She had a free will and she used it. Satan didn't force her to sin, nor did God force her not to sin. She chose what seemed to be most pleasing and beneficial to her. That's what sin and temptation are all about today as well.

That's still the way Satan and his demons work today. They appeal to our natural desires and urges, our sin nature. Our own desire for self-satisfaction sets us up for lies and deception and we take the bait. We always know right or wrong, obedience or disobedience, sin or righteousness.

God has sent the Savior (John 3:16). He fills the world with signs of Himself (Romans 1:20), He makes Himself available to those who seek Him (Deuteronomy 4:29), and He rescues anyone who comes to Him (John 6:37). When people reject what is "clearly seen" of God (Romans 1:20), it leads to a downward spiral of "foolish hearts" made dark (verse 21), idolatry (verse 23), and sexual impurity (verse 24). Finally, mankind "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (verse 25). In other words, the spiritual deception of mankind is the direct result of rejecting readily apparent truth. The person has made an exchange—the truth for a lie—and the devil is happy to facilitate the swap by presenting the sinner with a wide variety of lies from which to choose.

When we decide God's way is too hard or not the best for us, we open ourselves up to spiritual deception (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10). When we turn from truth, even ever so slightly, the door is open for lies and deception to rush in. And they do.

Eve didn't sin because she was hopelessly outmatched by a demonic force, making her do wrong when she thought she was doing right. Yes, she was lied to, but she chose to listen to the lie. That was followed by her longing look at what was forbidden and, finally, her taking the fruit in hopes of a better life.

God is always very fair and never in any way forces us into a position where we must sin. Sin is always our own choice (1 Corinthians 10:13). Turning from truth opens us to lies, and lies have

negative consequences. God allows these consequence so man will see their need to repent and turn back to Him. At least that's how it is supposed to work. Does it work that way in your life? (December 18, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

In what areas of life are you most open to deception? Why? What truth do you need to remember to counter the deception?

What can you do to help someone you know who is giving in to deception?

Ask God to show you if there is any deception in your life you need to turn from right now.

Ask God to show you if someone you know is giving in to deception and to show you what you can do to help them.

BLOG 608: ARE YOU AN IDOLATOR?

Idolatry. When we hear the word we think of statues and figures made of wood, brass or gold. They are strange little things and we wonder how anyone could ever worship them as their god. But many did, including God's people the Jews. That's why He made it clear this was forbidden: Exodus 20:2-6 *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."* God clearly warned the people, but they turned to idols anyway.

Yet time after time they turned from the Lord their God and worshipped the idols of the people around them (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Jeremiah 32:35; 2 Kings 23:10). After many warnings from the prophets God sent, eventually they went into captivity because of their idolatry. God reminded them time and again that He alone is God. Their disobedience resulted in terrible consequences. Their sin separated them from God and His protection. They had been warned but they neglected the warnings.

Isaiah was one of many prophets God used to remind the people that God, not the gods, was the creator of the world and everyone in it (Isaiah 40:1-24). He concludes his message by asking which of the idol gods compares to YHWH God? Who is equal to Him (Isaiah 40:25)? The answer seems quite obvious to us: idols cannot be compared to God Almighty in any way. Who today would place an idol over the living God? What was wrong with those people?

But don't be so fast to condemn them and excuse ourselves. Idolatry, by definition, is when someone or something becomes number one in our life, surpassing God Himself. What are some of the "idols" we put before God today?

Money and 'things' are not bad in themselves, but when they are more important than God, they are an idol. It is our attitude to them that is sinful (1 Timothy 6:10), not the amount we have. A poor person can make money an idol if he thinks of it more than God and sees it as the solution to his problems. Do you put your faith in the future in your savings or in God? When you have financial problems, does that interfere with your truth and worship? Does it take away your peace?

Relationships are another thing that are OK in themselves, but if a mate, children, or what others think of us is more important to our happiness than God we are making them an idol. Do you turn to God or to others when you have needs? Do you spend more time thinking about Jesus or your family and friends? Do you find security in God or in those closest to you?

Career and status can easily become an idol, something we turn to for comfort and security, for satisfaction and accomplishment. Do you serve your career, or does your career serve you? Where does work fit in your list of priorities? How much fulfillment do you find in your status compared to your relationship with God?

Sex was created by God to show love and commitment in marriage. It is a wedding gift from God not to be opened until the wedding night. Yet today sex has often become an end in itself instead of a means to an end. Does preoccupation with sex and love come before your preoccupation with God?

Technology and entertainment are important parts of our lives today, both social and work-related. What would happen to your well-being if you lost your phone, if your computer stopped working or if you couldn't access your entertainment sites online?

Our bodies, ourselves, can be idols as well if we are preoccupied with how we look, what kind of shape we are in, how we dress, etc. How important is your appearance to you? How much time and money do you spend on it compared to the time and money you spend on God?

Remember, none of these things are wrong in and of themselves. There is nothing wrong with enjoying a hobby or working out. There is nothing wrong with earning money or purchasing trinkets. There is nothing wrong with sitting in first class rather than coach. Or owning an expensive purse. But when these things come *first* in our lives, we've created an idol. God is a jealous God. He wants nothing to come before Him in our lives. He deserves first place in our lives. Nothing else satisfies. There is no substitute. There is only room for one God in our life and it must be the Lord God of the Bible. (December 25, Doylestown, PA)

1 John 5:21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

Which of the idols mentioned do you most struggle with?

How are they trying to meet needs that only God should be meeting?

What can you do to start every day making sure there are no idols in your life, that God alone is in first place?

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