

YOU CAN BE AN OVERCOMER

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4)

The four men who brought their friend to Jesus to be healed but could not get through the pressing crowd that formed a wall between them and the Lord; they overcame their problem by going up on the roof of the house, tearing away the roofing and lowering their man down into the presence of the Lord. Their action brought immediate response and the man was healed. This is a story of victory and gives a good lesson on the value of refusing to give up when the going gets rough. Paul the apostle spoke of being an overcomer: *"Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Cor. 15:57) Jesus told His disciples, *"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

When I was a boy, we played a game called King of the Hill. One of us, preferably me, would get on top of a dirt pile, or pile of sawdust at the sawmill, and yell, "Ready." The fellows at the bottom of the hill would come up one at a time to take over the position and send me falling and tumbling to the bottom. I had the advantage and would usually be able to send them tumbling instead. My victory did not last long; however, for then another boy would try the same. As long as I was able to keep the fellows pushed off and maintain my position, I was king of the hill. After I became a Christian and began to experience a time of revival in my life, I discovered that I had some enemies at the bottom of the hill who were determined to take away my victory. All Christians have the same enemies. They are the world, the flesh, and the devil. They manifest themselves as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Jesus experienced a time of temptation in these same three areas. Satan tried to get Him to turn stones into bread, then cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and finally, to bow down and worship him. Three times Jesus said, *"It is written," "It is written," "It is written,"* and refused to yield to any of these suggestions. Paul gives us help in this area. He wrote, *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."* (Galatians 5:16) Then John adds, *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* (1 John 2:16)

We, too can draw out the sword of the Spirit, (Eph. 6:17) and say, *"It is written."* When our flesh rises up in rebellion, we can say with Paul, *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."* (1 Corinthians 9:27) Then when the world begins to be attractive, and appeal to us we can remember the words of John, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* (1 John 2:15) When Satan charges up the hill after us like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), we can turn to the word again and quote, *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* (James 4:7)

In his message about the Children passing through the wilderness journeys, Paul said, *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."* (1 Corinthians 10:11) We not only learn how to overcome and have the victory from these Bible characters, but also what not to do.

Scanning through the Bible we see Noah overcoming the circumstances, Abraham looking for an unknown city by faith, Jacob winning over self, Moses rising up over inferiority, Joshua's victory at Jericho, Gideon's battle against the odds, Ruth's miraculous story, David's defeat of Goliath, Solomon's choice of wisdom over wealth and fame, Elijah's battle with discouragement, Nehemiah's opposition, Job's rise above devastation, Isaiah's elevation from humility to prominence, Jeremiah handling frustration and tears, Daniel's survival among the lions, Jonah's wrong outlook toward Nineveh, Peter overcoming inconsistency, Philip's lack of vision of the feeding of the 5,000, John the "Son of Thunder" becoming the beloved disciple, Thomas and his doubt, Mary and Martha's lack of faith, Matthew's giving up his tax collecting job, Paul's hardships, and even Christ rising from the tomb. All of these have a lesson on how to be victorious!

One preacher said, "every man is my teacher." We learn from Lot the cost of going to Sodom. We can learn about bad judgment from Naomi and Elimelech when they journeyed to Moab. Then we see the great cost of lust, immorality, and cover-up from the account of David and Bathsheba. We learn not to doubt from Thomas, and not to lie from Annias and Sapphira, and the confusion caused by Demas having loved this world.

Dr. Herbert Lockyer in his book *All the People of the Bible* lists over three thousand different names. Each one of these has a message from God. Dr. John Rice stated that every name in the Bible had a sermon in it. The Bible is about us and our relations to situations and circumstances.

Dr. Jack Hyles said that there are only about thirty-six different experiences and exposures that believers will confront in their lifetime. His point, that if we could search these out, and apply the teaching of the Bible to our lives in these areas, we could be prepared for anything that might come our way.

We will all sooner or later face fear, sorrow, death, sickness, handicaps, frustration, poverty, temptation, inferiority, anxiety, adversity, love, hate, pride, lust, covetousness, shame, ambition, jealousy, futility, anger, doubt, remorse, guilt, etc. In every situation the Bible instructs, illustrates, and gives Bible examples that offer solutions.

Paul the Apostle gave a lot of attention to this matter. He said, *"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Corinthians 15:57) And he added, *"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place."* (2 Corinthians 2:14) Again, *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an*

incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Then once again he said, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37)

John the beloved apostle wrote of some wonderful blessings in store for those who overcome. He wrote, "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*" (Revelation 2:7) Again "*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*" (Revelation 2:11) Then again, "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*" (Revelation 2:17) Then once again, "*He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*" (Revelation 3:5) and finally, "*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*" (Revelation 3:21)

If we are to be Overcomers, we will need to give attention to the following:

I. We must not put any confidence in the flesh.

The religious leaders of the day in which Paul wrote this hopeful message were steeped in religious practice. As Jesus said, "*Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*" (Matthew 23:24-27)

Paul explained that believers were different. "*For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*" (Philippians 3:3) "*But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*" (Romans 2:29)

When God was selecting a king for Israel, Jesse paraded his sons before the prophet one by one in all their finery, and God said no each time. Finally, they sent to the field for David. He came in sunburnt, dirty, smelling like sheep, and wondering what it was all about. Then we read, "*But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; [referring to Eliab] because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*" (1 Samuel 16:7) The Lord told Samuel to rise and anoint him king over Israel.

It is not our education, our personality, our financial success, or physical appearance. It is also not our works and good deeds. God is looking at our motives, sincerity, honesty, integrity, and character. As Zechariah wrote, *"Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."* (Zechariah 4:6)

We must, "delight ourselves in the Lord," (Psa. 37:4) "commit our way to the Lord," (Psa. 37:5) "trust in the Lord with all our heart," (Prov. 3:5) "submit ourselves to the Lord," (James 4:7) "seek the Lord and His righteousness," (Matt. 6:33) "present our bodies as a living sacrifice," (Rom.12:1) "yield ourselves unto God as an instrument of righteousness," (Rom. 6:13) "be crucified with Christ," (Gal. 2:20) "die daily," (I Cor. 15:31) "be planted in the ground as a corn of wheat." (John 12:24)

Doing these things will help us to be, *"filled with the Spirit"* (Eph. 5:18) and that will produce the *"fruit of the Spirit."* (Gal. 5:22)

II. We will need to starve the flesh.

Believers have two natures. When we were born physically, we inherited Adam's nature. David explained, *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."* (Psalms 51:5) Paul made it clear when he pointed out, *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"* (Romans 5:12) Jesus told Nicodemus, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* (John 3:6) When we are born again, we received our new or our spiritual nature; John tells us, *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"* (1 Peter 2:2) Paul again explains, *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. {he is: or, let him be} (2 Corinthians 5:17) "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."* (Romans 8:13) We are admonished, *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."* (Romans 13:14)

We must not feed on Hollywood movies, worldly television programs, humanistic literature, secular teaching, and lustful relationships. We will become what we are exposed to. We are now what we have been reading and watching. Someone has said that the mind is an unexposed film negative. Once we see, hear, taste, feel, or think, we have a permanent picture that becomes a part of who we are from that time on.

III. We will need to feed the new nature.

We have already seen Peter's words on this, *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"* (1 Peter 2:2) Paul adds to that, *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)*

One of the most important verses in all of the Bible touches on this growing: *"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."* (Joshua 1:8) David added, *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."* (Psalms 1:1-3) The word *meditate* in both of these passages means "to absorb or take in."

In an elementary chapel service we had a young preacher explaining to the children what the word *meditate* meant. He asked them to get an imaginary sponge the size of a basketball and hold it in their hands. Then he asked them to squeeze the sponge and make it the size of a softball, then again and make it the size of a baseball, then a golf ball, and hold it in one hand. He then asked them to get an imaginary two-gallon bucket of water in the other hand. One little boy called out to the preacher, "Where am I supposed to get my bucket of water?" "Same place you got your sponge," he answered.

Now, the young preacher instructed the children, "put the sponge down into the bucket and turn loose." "You know what will happen?" he asked. He then answered his own question, "The sponge will drink up about a gallon of the water." He then explained how the brain in our head looks like a sponge and acts like a sponge. When we immerse our mind in the "water of the Word" we absorb the principles of the book of God into our mind and become scripturally-minded. It is not possible to be spiritual without being scriptural.

A person may be very sincere, try to be a good Christian, and really want to, but unless he has the Word of God in his heart, he cannot respond and react to the things he experiences in a scriptural way. David explained it when he said, *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word."* (Psalms 119:9) And also, *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."* (Psalms 119:11)

IV. We will need to walk in the Spirit.

When we receive Christ as our Saviour and accept His payment on the cross of Calvary as the payment for our original and inherited sin, our body becomes the temple of God. Paul tells us, *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:16) He then explains, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."* (Romans 8:14) The Holy Spirit helps us to understand what is right and wrong, and that which hurts us and that which helps. To walk in the Spirit is to listen to His leadings and suggestions. *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."* (Galatians 5:16)

When the apostle Paul was converted on the Damascus Road, the first words that came out of his mouth were, "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6) This attitude became the law of his life. The impact of his life is almost unbelievable. As he himself said in the end of his life, "*I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.*" (Acts 26:19)

V. We will have to mortify the deeds of the flesh.

Jesus spoke of the offending hand, foot, and the eye. He made an attention-getting statement, "*Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.*" (Matthew 18:8-9) Mortify means "to kill or crucify." We are to deal severely with anything that hinders our relationship with the Lord and our obedience to His will.

We are all plagued with the flesh. Paul warned us to not put any confidence in the flesh. It doesn't matter if it's old flesh or young, rich flesh or poor, educated flesh or ignorant, clean flesh or dirty, majority flesh or minority. Jeremiah asked, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*" (13:23) You can perfume it, dress it up, decorate it, educate it, give it in a new car, put it in a big house, give it a lot of money, but it is still flesh.

VI. We must lay aside every weight and hindrance.

A runner in a marathon race does not show up dressed in long flannel underwear, heavy flannel shirt, sweater, wool topcoat, leather work shoes, and big ten-gallon cowboy hat. He lays all things aside and runs in skimpy running shorts, a T shirt, and sneakers. He sheds all the weight possible. The Bible likens the Christian life to a race. Paul identified with this race when he wrote, "*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*" (Hebrews 12:1) He added, "*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

These weights may not all be drinking alcohol, taking drugs, smoking, cursing, immoral behavior, stealing, lying, cheating, and unfaithfulness to one's mate. They might be sports, hobbies, club participation, computer games, and involvement in social activities that take up all our time and energy so that we can accomplish nothing to keep people from losing their soul, and bring glory to God in Heaven.

It is impossible to win our battles in the flesh in our own strength; however, the battle has already been won. The war is over. The seed of woman has bruised the head of the serpent. (Gen. 3:15) We cannot do it, but Christ can do it through us. Paul said, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* (Philippians 4:13) He also wrote, *"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."* (Romans 8:37)

The philosophy of the Bible is *"one [shall] chase a thousand and two [shall] put ten thousand to flight."* Little David defeated Goliath. Shamgar killed six hundred with an ox goad. Gideon's three hundred beat the whole Philistine army. Sampson slew a thousand with the jawbone of an ass. It is not the "size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog." Let's not look at the obstacles, but look ahead to the victory promised to us by the Lord Himself.