

● ● ● Mike McKeever ● ● ●

A close-up photograph of a hand holding two lit cigarettes. The cigarettes are positioned over a notepad with vertical blue lines. The title 'HE'S GOT NOTHING ON ME' is written in large, bold, black, slightly slanted capital letters across the middle of the notepad. The background is a solid light orange color.

**HE'S GOT
NOTHING
ON ME**

A Guide To Obtaining Christian

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The first time I read John 14:30, I remember thinking to myself that though it may not be the best verse in the Bible, it has got to be in the top ten.

I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,...

That verse is put differently in different versions of the Bible. It is talking about the devil and how Jesus perceives him. He says firstly that the devil has *no hold* on him:

“He’s got nothing in me.”

“He’s got nothing on me.”

“There’s nothing in me that belongs to him.”

“He’s got no claim on me.”

“He’s got nothing in common with me.”

“He’s got no power over me.”

You could go through the different versions of the Bible and see the actual truths behind the statement that Jesus made there. That is why it impressed me the first time I read that. I thought, “Wow! Imagine seeing the devil and saying, ‘Here comes the devil and he has not got one thing on me!’”

That is pretty good. I believe that that is our inheritance.

What’s The Devil Got On You?

The devil can be described in many different ways. He is the fertiliser of sin. He is the accuser of the brethren. He is the supreme tempter. Ultimately, as he approached Jesus or as he approaches you now, he does one of three things: *advance* sin, *accuse* you of sin or *tempt* you to sin.

When Jesus said, “Here comes the Prince of this world and he’s got nothing on me,” he was actually saying, “It is because I crucified the flesh.” In some sense, Jesus was crucified twice. The devil had no hold on him because Christ walked with a crucified flesh. There was nothing in him that the devil could infect.

You know what it is like when somebody has got something on you. It puts you at a bit of a disadvantage. I think that my wife is a much better wife than I am a husband. That tends to be common in marriages. I do an awful lot wrong and she does hardly anything wrong. She has got loads of things that she could say about my bad behaviour over the years, not that she does that.

Butlers it is not the same for me. When she does something wrong, I am delighted because I’ve got something on her. Several years ago when we

hadn't been married long, we had an argument. This particular argument was probably one of the biggest arguments that we had ever had.

She was washing the dishes when she lost her temper. She had this bread board in her hand and was going to throw it at me so I ran. There was a split second when I thought she was going to hit me but she changed her mind. Instead, she slapped it into the sink and the suds went everywhere.

It took her about five seconds before she said, "Oh no! I'm sorry!" After it was over, I went and got the bread board and I kept it. I treasured it. In fact, I said to her that we should mount it on the wall as a constant reminder that it is the only thing I've got on her.

Jesus saw the devil approaching and he said, "He's got nothing on me!" When someone has got something on you, then you are at a disadvantage.

Turn to James 1:13-15. It talks about sin within us and how we can easily be fooled as to its origin.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each of you is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

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disadvantage.*

It isn't only God who searches you. It isn't only God who comes to you by the Holy Ghost and searches you out. The devil does it too. Just as God seeks to build you up, so the devil also seeks out people.

In Job 1, it wasn't just God who was talking about Job. It was also Satan. They

were discussing whether or not Satan could find anything in Job. That was what the whole debate was about.

So James tells us that sin resides in, but is not limited to, the flesh. The devil comes to see if there is any wicked way in us and to draw that out. If we allow that to happen, we conceive sin, as James puts it. He talks about the birth process. Once there is conception, then sin begins to grow and ultimately give birth to sin which leads to death.

Lord of the Flies

Here is a grotesque but true example of the devil. Satan is described as Beelzebub, which means, lord of the flies. The picture that God wants you to see in Beelzebub is that the Devil is a rotten, stinking mass and that he is the lord of the flies, or spirits and demons. These flies are attracted to that rotteness.

When a fly lands on your hand, don't go, "Aw, look at the little fly!" If you blow up a picture of a fly, it has a great big trunk like an elephant. When it lands on your hand, it is looking for something to vomit on.

Thus the flies or the spirits, go to Satan, suck up from him and then go into the world to find something in someone. So God describes Satan as the Lord of the flies, the one who is trying to spread infection or in this case, sin.

Immature believers will argue this point. They will say, "I don't need to listen to this. I'm born again now! I'm fine. I've got a new nature. The old is gone and the new has come."

That is absolutely true but you have also got flesh. The flesh never leaves and you will have it until the day you die. Your flesh is not a demon; you can't drive it out. You have a new nature, absolutely, but

*Your flesh is not a
demon, you can't
drive it out !*

understand that you have a physical body which will be with you until death.

There is nothing that you can do about that. You can't pretend that you don't have it. So, human life can be a sad progression for many down into this trap of the devil. When Jesus made that statement, "Here comes the Prince of this world and he's got nothing on me," it means that he has *mortified* his flesh.

Look at the innocence in a child. You can see the purity within them. When that child becomes a teenager in the world, his or her flesh gets infected and attacked by these flies. Because of lack of understanding or knowledge, these same innocent children lose their glory.

The purpose of this book is to assess our hearts. I want to assess myself and find out if I can say the same thing that Jesus said. Can I say that the devil is in this world but he has got nothing in me? If I can't say that, then what are the things that I need to repent of? How do I purify this heart of mine? I don't know if there is a more freedom-filled statement in the Bible than that one that Jesus said. "He's got nothing in me"! That is total freedom.

What It Really Means To Be Free

We have got to be careful when we talk about freedom because there are many false freedoms but only really *one* true freedom. There are many examples of freedom that you may have experienced. I certainly have. I have been in many different pastoral groups over the years and some of them have been downright appalling.

In some groups, there were a lot of joking; jokes that you would never believe could be told in a Christian setting. There is behaviour that is out of the question, but some Christians call this freedom. It is not freedom. It is just loose living.

I went on a search and ironically, the clearest example of true Christian freedom rings in my mind from a time before I was saved. I was a heavy drinker and my whole social life was clubs and pubs. There was a born again Christian in our office and he was a really nice guy. We used to make fun of him now and again about being a believer.

I would say, “David, you coming out to town with us? Come on to the disco!”

David would say, “No, no, no!”

I will never forget one day in particular when I asked him the same question and as usual, he answered no. I turned to him and said, “Yeah, but you would like to wouldn’t you, Dave?”

He said, “No.”

I never forgot it. It was the way he said ‘no’. He meant it, the bright lights had no hold on him. The freedom he had struck me, as I had never seen that before.

It is a very sad thing that I have to go back to the days before I was saved to think of a classic example of true freedom. But that was true freedom and it did affect me. All of a sudden I was sitting there and my pint of beer didn’t taste quite as good because I was thinking about how I had never experienced freedom. David could say to me what Jesus was saying to the Devil, “You’ve got no hold on me.”

Embracing Jesus’ Mindset

Let us now get the mindset that Jesus had. How on earth could he say that and how can I bring myself to be able to say the same thing? Firstly, what I see in Christ there was that he was not confused about light and darkness. He was **not confused about truth and lies**. There were no gray areas with Jesus. He had a crystal clear distinction of right and wrong.

Years ago I was on a trip to a bird park in Wales. It was a dedicated bird park. Dedicated bird parks are quite an experience and it was not what I had expected. I walked in through the gate and there were only a few cages. Most birds were not contained. That was the first shock.

You walk up to a perch with an eagle sitting there. I thought, “Why doesn’t he fly away?” There was no cage. I was completely puzzled by that. Some of the birds would fly around but they would just go so far and then come back and sit on the perch.

The tour guide came by and explained the reason behind it. He said, “You see, when the birds are young, we tie them by the foot and we attach them to a long cord and they are allowed to sit on the perch. When the bird wants to get away, he flaps but is held back. It keeps trying but can’t get free. In the end the mind is set and the bird only flies so far.”

Finally, the cord is removed but they leave a plastic hoop around the bird’s foot. That bird, even though totally free, would never try to properly fly away again.

Isn’t the power of a lie amazing? All of those birds were really free but they didn’t exercise it and they didn’t actually believe it. When Hitler was winning the Second World War, he used to tune down his propaganda machine because he didn’t need the lies. As he started to lose the war, he relied more and more heavily on propaganda.

So it is with the devil because the devil has totally lost against you. Jesus has got total victory. Now what is he going to do? He lies. Don’t underestimate the power of the devil’s lies or of living under the lie.

Remember the four minute mile. The Romans were so determined to break the four minute mile that they used to line the runners up and release lions to chase the runners. But they still didn’t break it until our recent past when

Roger Bannister broke the four minute mile. Everybody thought that it was so amazing.

I can't remember the exact statistics but in the year after he broke the four minute mile, something like twelve people broke it and the following year something like a hundred. It just went up and then rocketed. What had been broken? The mindset and the lie that it couldn't be done. When one person could be free we can all be free.

So it is with Christian freedom. Jesus is giving us a sign post that you and I can be totally free and address the devil in the same way that he does. Thus the first point is to watch out for the power of lies in your life concerning freedom. Take a simple lesson from Jesus.

The second point is in John 8:36. It is a famous piece of scripture.

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

That is an important statement and we need to understand it fully to experience it fully. It doesn't say that he who the Son sets free is free in principle. It says that **he that the Son sets free is free indeed.**

If you have ever sold a house, you will know that if someone makes you an offer and the offer is accepted, they put a sign outside that says, "Sale Agreed", or in some countries, "Agreed in Principle". Those are legal terms.

To the seller, "Agreed in Principle" means nothing. It only means that someone has made an offer. But no money has exchanged hands. It is only in principle. It is unlikely that any surveys have been carried out and there certainly wouldn't have been any loans issued. So "Agreed in Principle" is not a great thing but people still tend to get excited about it but are often disappointed.

God doesn't say that he who the Son sets free is free in principle. He who the Son sets free is free in their deeds; is free in their actions, is free to live as they want to live empowered by the Son.

There is a whole Biblical concept behind being set free in deeds. This is called the *law of freedom in Christ Jesus*. God has had a progressive way in which he has tried to reveal his truth in us. It began in nature where God revealed himself. It says that in Genesis and in Romans.

God has made himself known in nature; he has made himself known in the *conscience*. Some people say, "Just live by your conscience." I would never say that to anybody lost or saved. Your conscience is a broken measure. It is faulted but nonetheless it was part of the stages and has a key role even now.

If it had worked, God wouldn't have had to continue the list of ways he revealed himself. God revealed himself in *stone* with the Ten Commandments. He revealed himself in *Jesus Christ* and he revealed himself in *scriptures*. He goes on to reveal himself in your *heart* so that the law of God is known to you.

Ultimately at the top of the list, God's revelation of freedom to this world is *you*. It is a living epistle that you walk in total freedom in this life. It is as if we are to be that living word.

Laws are funny things. We get conned by the world of science when it talks about the law of gravity. The law of gravity is called a law because it should work in all circumstances. If I drop an object, it will fall to the ground because of gravity. But gravity doesn't actually work in all circumstances, like in vacuums for example. So it really does not deserve the status of a law.

However the law of freedom in Christ can work for me at all times. But there is an approach that I have got to take.

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When a person gets saved, it is like God

takes them out of the world and puts them on a narrow path. That path is somewhat treacherous. We get there by grace and through faith in God. To stay on this path we need to learn a little bit about the ditches on both sides because they are there.

On one side of life you could end up going back towards the law as a way of staying right with God. If you do that, in Galatians it is called, ‘falling from grace’.

It says in Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” Don’t go back to living by works because that will just make you self-righteous. Don’t bring yourself under the old law again but stay under grace. It is an important point.

Don’t go into works and don’t go into sin either; that’s the other ditch. Notice how that both ditches cause problems with self. It is either *self-righteousness* because we are working for salvation or it is *self-condemnation* because of sin. Neither of these constitutes freedom.

If anyone is in either one of these ditches, the devil has got something on you and you can’t have freedom. Freedom only applies under grace; when I live and walk and am in full knowledge of the grace of God in my life.

Remember that any prayer has got two entry qualifications before God. When God hears you pray, there are only two things on his mind. Firstly, is this person aware that they need *grace*? No matter how much they have worked, it doesn’t count towards the answer of their prayer. Grace is the first and faith is the second; is this person approaching me in *faith*?

I got saved by God’s grace by putting faith in Jesus Christ. Now I must walk everyday in the same way; not trusting in my works and not being defeated by the devil but being sustained by the grace and by my own faith in God.

You can tell if you will end up in the ditch just simply by the way you live. Here is an example. It is called the ‘good day, bad day’ example. Let’s say you

get up tomorrow morning and the sun is shining. You have your quiet time, drive to work and there is no traffic. You go in to work, someone hands you a cup of tea and everything is rosy. God is in his Heaven and all is right with the world.

Someone comes to you and says that there is somebody there who is sick. And you say, "I'll pray for them!"

The next day comes. You get up and it is raining. You get out of the house and you have a parking ticket on your car. At work you have an argument with the boss and are all out of sorts. Someone comes and says that there is a person there who is sick. And this time you say, "Oh, not me today!"

A person who thinks like that is in a relationship of works. Your prayer is no more valid on the Monday than on the Tuesday. You thought your prayer as going to be answered by works but that is not freedom.

Where are you in relation to this? Is it a walk of grace? Or have you veered into works? Has the devil succeeded in bringing you into sin to invest your flesh? If so, the flesh needs to be crucified, it needs to be mortified.

So firstly, Jesus does not accept the lie of the devil. He understands and sees it and doesn't accept it. Secondly, he fully understands that he is free. He knows that he is not bound. You are free if you are born again. That is a fact. Everything else is propaganda. It is extremely effective and has worked for thousands of years.

The devil has defeated every Christian who ever lived. No human being has ever beaten him. Jesus Christ is the only one who ever defeated the devil.

Your life is hidden with Christ in God. Don't get ideas about walking in some sort of other strength. You need grace. You need the empowerment of God, faith in him and that alone will sustain anyone in a walk of freedom. Jesus understands what freedom is and I hope that we do too.

Thirdly, Jesus **knows what he is freed from and what he is freed unto**. He is freed from Satan. He says, “He’s got no hold on me.” He is freed from sin and the guilt of sin.

Don’t you feel sorry for the Jews? The Jews would go to the temple, with bulls and goats for sacrifice and blood would flow out of that temple 24/7, 365 days a year. But no matter how much blood ran and how many animals were sacrificed, the Jews still felt guilty.

It was because the blood of bulls and goats did not have the power to remove guilt. It was just a cover. One man died on the cross and as a result, true freedom is available to us. Freedom from Satan, from sin and the guilt of it.

Therefore you are free from the accusations of the law. You are free from being ruled by *men*, from *death* and ultimately free from the *grave*. And lastly we are freed unto *mercy* from God instead of his wrath. We are no longer enemies with God. Instead, he has made a bond through the cross of friendship. Instead of sin we now have service. Instead of bondage we are freed unto liberty.

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By the way, if you are a Scot, the book of Galatians is written to you. The Gauls were originally the Celts and there are so many people around the world whose forefathers this book is addressing and maybe traits we find in ourselves. These people had a problem with works.

Turn to Galatians 5:1-4.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set you free.” Understand that the passion behind that verse is the heart of God. Imagine having your child in prison when you know that you have done everything in your power to set them free; having to live with them under bondage when you know that you have done everything. Yet they do not listen and they do not respond or believe.

Here is a story to illustrate this. A tramp was walking down a country lane. As he walked, he started to hear screeching and squealing. It sounded like birds. There was a barn up ahead and the squealing was coming from there. He walked over, peeked in the door and inside there was a boy who had a cage with a load of birds in it and the boy was torturing them by breaking the birds’ wings and poking out their eyes.

The tramp felt so sorry for those birds. He wondered if that boy would sell him the birds. He looked around for what he had got to buy them with and all he had was ten pounds.

He turned to the boy and said, “Hey boy! Will you sell me those birds?”

The boy said, “These birds are worth nothing!”

Then the boy thought to himself that he could make a bit of money and asked, “How much do you have?”

The tramp says, “I’ll give you everything I’ve got: ten pounds.”

“Done!”

And off went the tramp, proud and pleased with what he'd got.

He started to heal and fix up those birds; restoring them and bringing them back to full health. His pride and joy was the day that he could unlock the cage and let them go. That day came and he said, "Go!" The birds flew up in the air but returned right back into the barn. You can imagine the disappointment of that tramp.

I believe that God is screaming from the Heavens, "It was for freedom that I set you free!" Do not go back under the ruler of this world but walk in that liberty and freedom.

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The word, nothing, means ‘not one thing’. It describes, basically, something about the heart of Christ. It tells us that he operated a zero tolerance policy toward sin. Not one sin would be allowed. We should have the same perspective, not only in principle but also in practice.

First of all in principle; to say, “I will make a commitment to operate in my life a zero tolerance policy toward sin. Not one sin will I tolerate.” That, in my opinion, is the heart of God. We accept that in principle and then we endeavour to the best of our ability as God enables us and equips us to overcome anything and everything that the devil would put our way.

Zero Tolerance to Sin

You may not be aware of this, but from my pastoral care experience over the years, I have seen that many Christians do not have a zero tolerance policy toward sin. In fact, I would say that most believers actually tolerate quite a lot of sin.

Many times I have had to go into a home where someone has been diagnosed with cancer. For several of those people it has been lung cancer. In nearly every case, the person would have been born again and maybe for many years. But this person would be still struggling with smoking.

They have been saved for many years, good church-going Christians; but they were never able to kick the habit. I would go and visit such a home and people said that they are shocked that that member of the family had got cancer.

I was sorry but I had to ask why they were so shocked. They often said that they were a good person, they tithed, they went to church, they were involved in evangelism. But there was one thing that was forgotten and that was that they were smokers.

I don't mean to offend you or hurt you but I am not shocked that these people get lung cancer. I am heartbroken for them and will help and pray for them as much as I can, but shocked? No.

When Jesus says that the prince of this world is coming and he's got nothing on me, he could equally say that the prince of this world is coming and I give him nothing to take advantage of, not even one thing. That is zero tolerance.

"I don't smoke, so he can't put cancer on me that way."

"I won't open any door to him."

To get into your house, a burglar doesn't need you to leave every door open. He just needs *one*. Get smart and realise that the only true freedom is to actually follow the example of Christ and to truly operate, to the best of your

ability, a zero tolerance policy towards sin. Then you will see God make up the gap.

This one principle is found in Mark's Gospel again and again. In the famous parable of the rich young ruler, Mark draws out this principle of how one thing in a person's life could stifle their freedom or their Christian growth.

Turn to Mark 10:17-21.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honour your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

This was one good man but he lacked one thing. There was one door open in that man's life. He was tied to wealth and was unable to walk away from that. Jesus put his finger on the one thing that was actually stopping that man from freedom. He actually didn't have a zero tolerance policy.

Go back a few chapters in Mark's Gospel and hear Mark, once again, show us the zero tolerance policy.

Turn to Mark 6:19-20.

So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

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Herod did many things except the one thing he needed to do. In my belief, Herod ended up in hell. Herod listened to the Gospel; he liked John. He was afraid of the God of John. He did many things in his life but for one reason, it looks like he ended up in hell. You don't have to have a thousand sins in your life; one sin is enough to puncture your balloon.

Daniel is a prophetic picture of how to live as an end times believer. Look at what happened to Daniel. The servants were sent in to find something on him so that they could arrest him. The conclusion was that they couldn't find anything on him. That is in your Bible for a reason. Daniel had a zero tolerance policy. In fact, they had to change the law in order to get something on him.

Face to Face with the Father of Lies

The Christian has warfare on three distinct fronts: the *world*, the *flesh* and the *devil*. It seems to me that everything to do with the devil has got to do with lies. He is a liar, and knows full well the power of a lie as we saw in Chapter One. Jesus calls him the 'father of lies'.

Following the devil or being influenced by him is succumbing to lies and results in bondage. Following and obeying Jesus leads to truth and freedom.

The devil comes to lie to us in three different ways:

- 1) He lies to you about you.
- 2) He lies to you about God.
- 3) He would like you to lie to yourself about yourself.

Scripture tell us to **stop entertaining the devil or his thoughts**. Some Christians do entertain those thoughts. When you invite someone to dinner, you welcome them in, cook them a meal, sit and talk to them; you *entertain* them.

We have been warned about this thing called accusation. When anything comes to you, a thought that lies about God, lies about who you are in God, or gets you to deceive your very self, watch it! Watch it and don't entertain it.

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Take the example of people who are sitting at home and depressed; it is like they have made a meal for the devil. They are entertaining thoughts. The devil starts small with a thought and you start to think that you are useless, unlovable and worthless. It becomes a *toehold* as you entertain it. It then becomes a *foothold* and ultimately it will become a *stronghold* in your mind. That is very difficult to deal with.

If you entertain thoughts about yourself or thoughts about God that are unscriptural, the devil will serve you up a plate of that every day. Stop eating it. Stop entertaining it.

Secondly, Jesus learned to **place responsibility for sin appropriately and properly**. Blame shifting, in my opinion, is one of the greatest areas where Christians really do fall. They tend to blame the devil for everything.

Once when we were pioneering a church, we were asked to have a prayer meeting in the home of a relatively new convert. When we arrived the scene

was shocking. He had beer cans and cigarettes everywhere; the TV was playing loud rock music. He was smoking quite happily in his chair and said to me, “What time does the prayer meeting start?” As I started to talk to that man about the way he was living his life, his defence was to say, “Pastor, the devil has been having a go at me.”

In moments like those, you realise the power; the destructive, blinding power of blame shifting. He really believed that there were principalities and powers against him. You have to say, “Sir, it is not the devil. Really and truly, the devil could take a day off in your case. This is your flesh.” But he would not accept it.

*As long as you shift
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freedom.*

This type always quotes scripture at you, such as, “We do not fight against flesh and blood but principalities and powers.” Yes that is true, but the context of Paul’s statement in Ephesians is about demons who do not have flesh and blood, but *you* do.

As long as you shift the blame to the devil, you will never walk in freedom. That is a tactic, a very basic tactic. Remember what God said to Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door and you must master it”.

You have got to take responsibility for sin and place it appropriately: the world, the flesh, the devil. All three are involved. If we don’t see them, then we will get caught in one of those traps.

Firstly, we have got to learn how to handle accusation. Secondly, don’t blame shift. And thirdly, **deal with temptation**. If you intend to have a successful Christian life, walking in freedom, you must come the way of Jesus. He started by dealing with the world, then he dealt with the flesh, and then he dealt with the devil.

He spent thirty years working in carpentry with his father during which time he conquered the world. Then he dealt with the flesh in the forty days of fasting. Finally he dealt with the devil. You will see this pattern throughout scripture.

When the devil came to Jesus to try and destroy him, he offered him the world. He said, "I'll give you all of these kingdoms of the world." Jesus replied with scripture. The world didn't work so the devil turned to the flesh. He said, "You're hungry, you've been fasting for forty days. Turn those stones into bread." Jesus rejected that.

A lack of awareness about the devil's battle plan and strategy sees many Christians not even set off from first base. They don't understand the principles and get caught on these things. We fall for the blame-shifting thing. We accept accusations that stifle our freedom or we get caught up with not understanding the battle that surrounds temptations.

In the World, But Not Of It

How do you know if a problem comes into your life is of *the world* and not of the flesh or the devil? Many Pentecostals think that spiritual warfare is just about the devil, the devil and the devil. Spiritual warfare is about the world, the flesh and the devil. Each one of these needs to be understood and appropriately dealt with.

For example, if you don't set your alarm clock, sleep in, arrive at work late, and your boss tells you off, that that must be the devil? No, it's not the devil. That is the world, plain and simple. You are under the same rules as anybody else out there.

If you are going down the motorway at 100 mph and behind you comes a police car, some Pentecostals might look and say, "Here are the demons

coming to get me.” No, it is the *law* and you are the one who is breaking the law.

If you park on double yellow lines and the nice traffic warden comes along and puts a ticket on your car, don’t blame the devil. If you are having trouble paying your mortgage or your rent this month, understand that we are in the world.

From a very young age, we are taught to blame shift and it doesn’t bring freedom. It doesn’t help us to win the battle.

Steven Gaukroger is a famous Baptist here in Britain. He was on a Christian retreat with his daughter. They arrived and there was a road outside the apartment that they were staying in. It was a busy road so he said to his daughter, “Listen, this is our apartment. The rule is that you do not go on that road, understand?”

The girl said, “Yes.” He went off to the conference, came back and the girl was on the road.

“Get into the house! What did I tell you? Don’t go on the road and I’m not going to tell you again.”

He went again, came back, where’s the girl? She was on the road again.

“Get back in the house!”

The third time it happened he really lost his temper. He sat her down and said, “Right! Why did you do that?” A nine-year old girl who had to come up with an answer said, “The devil made me do it, daddy!”

We can laugh at a story like that but the same can happen within us where we blame shift and get stuck in a rut. Don’t blame shift. The book of 1 John is written to help you deal with that first part, the world.

Recognising Fleshly Desires

Paul says that everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial.

What about the *flesh*? How do we deal with the flesh and how is that different to dealing with the world and the devil? Paul says that everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial. Over the years I have seen some people get very messed up with the way in which they deal with this one. Often when fighting the devil, the temptation is to do so out of the flesh. The Bible says not to rejoice (flesh!) when

demons submit to you.

I had an experience dealing with two people and it grieves me now to see what happened to both of them. These two were dancing on the devil's head, coming into the church, and rejoicing over the submission of demons. I saw it and called one aside and said, "You are rejoicing greatly over the fact that demons submit and I am warning you not to that."

She laughed at me, "You don't know what you are talking about!"

Christians who refuse to crucify their flesh will try and crucify the devil. It is just another form of blame shifting. I could see that woman struggling in her own life and coming to church with great frustrations. But her way of dealing with it was to dance on the devil and rejoice in a way that Jesus himself said not to rejoice.

It is a warning because you get into a bad spirit. There was a man in a similar situation. He was rejoicing in the wrong way. We need to crucify our flesh and not the devil. So there is a warning there and we would do well to heed to it. Be careful about habits of the flesh because they don't just stay there. Flesh

habits lead to spiritual things. There was one guy who was demonised I felt sorry for him because I knew the family.

I prayed, “God, everybody is talking about this guy. It is such a bad witness. Would you send him to us and we will drive that spirit out of him and set him free?”

God did. He sent him to us. We drove the demon out of him and it was fantastic. That guy sat in the front row of our church for about three months totally free. People would come to see him to see if it was true. He had done mad, crazy things for several years but was now free.

One day I was in the church working on the platform and this guy was at the back. He had been completely free for several months. I listened and I could hear his old habit back in his mouth. He had had a very bad habit of talking about leaders. He hadn’t done that for months and when I heard him, I asked him out for chat over coffee.

I sat him down and said, “I heard you talking in that old way again. Remember years ago when you started all of this, it probably started with a habit in the flesh. Because you persisted in that habit, at some point some demon got you. Now you have been set free and you are still free.”

*The fleshly habit had
led to a bad spirit and
the same could
happen to you and to
me.*

In fact, at that time, he was free of that spirit. He was just in the flesh. I told him that he needed to break that habit because if he didn’t, he would go back under that spirit again. He wouldn’t accept that. He ended up back in a much worse state than he ever was.

The last I heard, someone had seen him in another city running down the main street as fast as he could and a few feet

behind him was a man with a stick. This guy was crazy. The fleshly habit had led to a bad spirit and the same could happen to you and to me.

There is a warning here. Deal with the flesh. Crucify the flesh and mortify the flesh. Paul simply says, "Make no provision for the flesh."

I ran a drop-in centre for drug addicts for many years and through it did much good. The local police worked with us and helped us greatly with what was a dangerous and difficult task. However one day, two new policemen turned up with a different attitude to us. They began to hassle me and enter our centre and cause what I saw as unnecessary problems. I was greatly distressed.

One day a guy pulled me aside and said, "Did you know the centre is private property under your control? The police have no legal right to behave as they are without further permissions."

I explained that I did not know about that. He said that the next time it happened, I should just put the policemen out.

Well, next time came very quickly. I was dealing with a particular man when once again, in came these two new policemen to talk to him. I turned to them and said, "Excuse me, would you leave my building please."

They were stunned. I asked again politely and they did. I followed them outside and explained that I had a longstanding relationship with all the police in that area and was a personal friend of their sergeant who fully understood my work. I also asked them to stop bothering me. To my shock, they placidly walked away and never bothered me again.

There was a law available to me I knew nothing about. Now you are being told about another law, the law of freedom for those who are in Christ. Later we will look at the operational policies for that law. But we are free. Of course, we are free in principle but more than in principle. We are free indeed if we apply that law. Read Ephesians, read Galatians and read 1 John. Prepare

your mind so that one day soon you can say, “The prince of this world may be in the world but he has got nothing on me.”

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What is Christian freedom? Paul said in Galatians 5:1, “It was for freedom that Christ has set us free.” What freedom is he talking about? Obviously he is talking about freedom from the law. But it was really freedom from three principal things. It was freedom from the world, the flesh and the devil. There are many ways that you could look at the freedom that Christ offers you. I think that this way is probably one of the simplest and easiest to understand.

It is freedom from the *world* and all that is in the world. The Bible has one book in particular that focuses on that: the book of 1 John. There was a revival recently in Bogota, Columbia. A church went from 500 to 250,000 in around five years. The pastor of that church made every new convert read the epistle

of 1 John because he saw it as so crucial. He thought that if he could just get the truths of 1 John into the church that they would be free.

Secondly, there is freedom from the *flesh*. This is where Galatians comes in. It was for freedom that Christ has set you free. Therefore, stay free.

Lastly, there is freedom from the *devil*. The book of Ephesians deals mainly with this.

The world is called 'darkness' in 1 John. His conclusion is simple; we are freed from the darkness by walking in the light. We get free from the flesh by crucifying it; that is, by controlling our diet.

Watching What We Eat

About five or six years ago, all you heard about everyday were diets. There are all sorts of diets. Here's a list. There is the anti-aging diet. There is a blood type diet. There is a fruitarian diet. There is a macrobiotic diet, a raw fruit diet, a vegan diet, a vegetarian diet, a whole foods diet.

And my wife invented a few of her own. The first one she came up with was a small plate diet. Have you ever heard of that? She came in with this dainty little plate with not much on it. Anyway, that got off to a good start on day 1. The next day, in she came dutifully with a little plate. Day 2 well done. By day 5, there was so much stuff piled on that little plate it was like the leaning tower of Pisa!

Hungry for God

Imagine that I invited you to a meal in a really swanky restaurant, the best that I could find, and I said to meet me there at half past seven. That day comes and at seven o'clock in the morning you go to McDonalds to have a big breakfast. At twelve o'clock you go to Pizza Hut and have a buffet. You then

pop into Subway on the way to the Restaurant just to grab a quick sub. Would you do that?

In light of the fact of what's just about to happen and that someone is going to lay before you the finest of fare, would you prepare properly for that or would you come already stuffed? It is very poignant. Think about it for a moment. Appetite plays a very big part when it comes to God.

There are three reasons why you wouldn't stuff yourself on that day. The first one is the **anticipation**. You would be eagerly anticipating the good meal you were going to have. If you believed that and appreciated it, it would cause you to have anticipation.

You should have **respect** for the person who is doing the cooking. You should hold off and not just eat anything. Restrain yourself out of respect for yourself and respect for what they are preparing for you.

If you have anticipation and respect, then it will end up with number three: **excitement**. These three principles apply to your spiritual life and my spiritual life.

Every Sunday we all arrive at church but different people come in different ways. For some people you can't feed them because they don't want it. You go to conferences and you see it very clearly there. One group of people would be so excited and pumped up about it and another group of people would not be so excited. It is all in how they came. If they arrived stuffed with the world, then it wouldn't matter what you were offering.

It is the same with worship. If you arrive with an attitude and heart of worship, then the worship leader could be singing anything in any way and you would still be worshipping. It is in your attitude.

How do you normally go to church? It really is about how we approach God. The Bible is absolutely packed with comparisons of your appetite for food and your appetite for God:

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

“He brought me to his banqueting table.”

Your appetite for food is constantly compared to your appetite for God. The point behind it and what God is trying to say is simple but it doesn't make it any less important. Just like your physical diet affects your physical health, so your spiritual diet will affect everything in due course. You can get away with a bad diet for a while but in time, you are going to pay a price for that.

*If all that you give
God is one hour of
concentration on
Sunday, that is
imbalanced.*

In my experience, one of the most difficult things to do is to have a balanced diet in Christian lives. There are 168 hours in the week. If all that you give God is one hour of concentration on Sunday, that is imbalanced. You can't give the world 167 hours and then come and give God only one.

So when we plan our spiritual diet, we must take a holistic approach. You have got to look at your life and think, “What actually is my diet on Monday? What is my diet on Tuesday? And how balanced is it?”

Turn to Luke 2:6-7.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

There was no need for Luke to record that there was no room, unless of course he was making a point. He wanted you to see that when the Christ came into the world there was *no room in the world*. The world was actually full of the world. Christ could not get in. They were already full.

Again, it is like a comparison to your appetite and mine. If we are already stuffed, then we have no room for Christ and no appetite for him. The truth is that the amount of room that you give to God in your life is determined by what you think of him. That is the amount of expectation that you have. That is the amount of anticipation that you have. That is the amount of respect that you have.

*If we are already
stuffed, then we have
no room for Christ
and no appetite for
him.*

Benny Hinn was once in Africa during a great drought. They asked him to pray that the rains would come. So they prayed. The next day, he noticed that there was a child who was walking with an umbrella in the baking sunshine. He said to the child, "You have an umbrella?"

The child said, "Yes. You prayed for rain, Pastor Benny."

The only one with any anticipation was a little child. She actually *believed* it. All that I am saying is that when it comes to your diet, if you believe that God will pour spiritual blessings upon you, then you will have to make room for that.

Every one of us has a God-shaped hole inside of us but what do you fill it with? God has put that hole there. It is a missing jigsaw piece. But how do you handle it? What do you do with it? He has put it there but it is your responsibility as to how it is filled.

Turn to Romans 1:21.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

They had an appetite but they didn't choose to satisfy that appetite with God. Instead of fruits and vegetables, it was chocolate and ice cream. There is a hunger for God inside every one of us but the world out there will offer us all sorts of junk to fill that hole.

I'm going to ask six different questions through which you will be able to assess your diet. They say, "If you don't know what you want to eat, you're not hungry."

Whetting My God-Appetite

The first point is whether or not I have a **hunger for the word of God**? That is a very good way of assessing my spiritual condition. If I don't have a hunger for the word of God, then what I have I stuffed myself with? Something is in there. There was no room in the inn. When Christ came he couldn't get in. They had no room for him.

When my stepson was at home at age fourteen or fifteen, he would walk into the kitchen, open the fridge and look inside. The fridge would be packed with good stuff. He would look, close the door, turn back and open the fridge again. He would look again, think about it and close the door. Five minutes later he would go back again. There was perfectly good food in the fridge. There was nothing wrong with the food so what was going on here?

The Christian will open the Bible, look in it and then close it again. It is exactly the same thing. It is not the food. The food is abundant. It is in our approach and in our diet. It is all in the way that we arrive.

My stepson would have had chocolate or crisps on the way home from school. In fact, Jeanette does that even now. I'll be cooking and she'll be eating a bag of crisps. I'll say "What are you doing? Don't eat that, it's only small but we'll kill our appetite."

We lose appreciation for the things of God, we lose respect for the things of God and then we lose excitement of the things of God. It all starts with our diet. Do not underestimate how important these things are. One's diet is a very personal thing. The church cannot do this for you. That is why I want you to think about yourself. Your diet is your problem and your issue.

I once got a bag of instant potato mix, 'just add water' kind of thing and I was wondering how much benefit was lost in the processing from a normal potato. A dietician at a local hospital told me, "You could estimate about forty-five percent all the way up to eighty percent of the nutritional value of that potato would be lost."

I was shocked and was not expecting the estimates to be so high. So it is. Your diet is your responsibility. We live in a consumer culture. And we must be careful not to take the same approach and push all responsibility onto the church. That will never work. This is a personal issue.

Do I have a hunger for the word of God? Yes or no? If I don't have a hunger then let's answer the next question, "What is feeding me instead?" "What am I eating that is taking the place of him?"

David didn't have that problem. He said, "As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you." He chose a deer for a very good reason. A dog pants with its tongue but a deer doesn't do that. A deer pants with its whole body.

When a deer wants water, its ribcage starts to move out and in, the whole of the animal moves back and forward. You can actually *see* thirst in a deer. “

Think of yourself just for a moment. Are the scriptures alive to you? Or have you got a fridge type mentality? If the scriptures aren't alive, then fast and stir up your spiritual appetite once again for God's word that it might be the source of your diet.

God is Not McDonald's

The second question you can ask yourself is whether or not you want to have **time with God**. And again McDonald's is another very good example. McDonald's is a fast food place. But you just cannot approach God that way. Our world is a changing world and the people of old would be shocked at the way we live our lives. Everything is so quick.

I think that the average person leaves a queue twice a week. Somebody will be standing in the queue and because it is so long, they will not continue to wait. The length of time that people are willing to wait anywhere is getting shorter and shorter. We get impatient with our staff, we get impatient with our colleagues, we get impatient with our family and before we know it, we are impatient with God.

This fast food type attitude happens all the time. People will come forward at an altar call. They have a problem and they are waiting in the queue to be prayed for, but they won't even wait for me to finish with someone else. They will walk off. In a hurry? Life can get to you like that.

Turn to 1 Samuel 13:7-11. Take a look at the cost of being in a hurry.

Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. He waited for seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

"What have you done?" asked Samuel.

1 Samuel 13:14.

But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

Saul basically felt that God was being a bit slow. Seven days went by and Saul was so proud in his own heart that he thought to himself, "I'm not waiting."

*You cannot have a
fast food type attitude
with God.*

You cannot have a fast food type attitude with God. It simply won't work. We might have it in the shop, we might have it with our family and friends but you cannot afford to approach God like that.

So how is your hunger for God? Do you want time with God? Will you give him quality time? Hundreds of people have asked me about callings over the years:

"I want to find my calling."

"I want to find my mission in life."

“I want to find out where I’m going in life.”

When you ask them how much time they have given to God to find out, sometimes the answer is surprisingly little! I take it immensely seriously.

I once lost my way and found myself unclear about the next step for my life. As it happened, my sister was away for a few days, so I asked if I could use her house for solitude to seek God. In her kitchen at about seven or eight o’clock in the morning, I said, “God, I need to know where I am going.”

There was nothing else on my agenda. I was in the kitchen for hours and in the waiting, God began to deal with issues in me. Things I had not come there to deal with. I found myself forgiving this person, praying for that one. Twelve hours later, God spoke a word to me about my future, a detailed clear word.

All that I am saying is that there is no quick fix. If you are looking for the future of your life be that in your career, in your business, or in your ministry then get serious, please do not approach God like McDonald’s.

Praying Right

Thirdly you can tell a person’s diet just by **listening to their prayer content**. Prayers tell you a lot about people. They can either they show that a person is in a good place with God or how far they are from God. The content and attitude of some prayers can sometimes be so far wrong it is incredible.

Take an example of two women both of whose husbands are not saved. You can listen to one woman and her prayer might go something like this: “Oh Lord, he is so deaf. He is so dumb and blind. He doesn’t seem to be moving a millimetre. I gave him the Bible and he hasn’t even picked it up.”

It is telling God what he already knows. It is all negative and you see years go by without salvation in that home. But hear another person in the same situation pray and you can tell what their diet is.

The other woman would say: “God, my father wasn’t saved and I prayed and you saved him. My mum wasn’t saved and I prayed and you saved him. When I had lack, I sought you and you answered me. And the same God who answered me for my dad, my mum and responded to my prayer when I had need, will now save my husband.”

You can hear and see faith within a person from their prayer content. You will not pray like that latter woman unless you on the right diet. We are what we eat. We are what we take in.

Lack-lustre World

Has the world lost its appeal for you? Jesus overcame the world first, then the flesh and then the devil. There is an order. He worked in the world for thirty years. He would have been a good employee in the family business. He overcame the world then he overcame the flesh in the forty days of fasting. At the end of the fasting came the devil. He overcame the devil. There was an order then and there is an order now for us. If the world is going to lose its appeal then there is a dietary commandment upon us to feed upon the word of God and to make him our delight.

Fellowship of the King

Fifthly, do I desire fellowship? Love of the church is so close to the love of Christ. I’m often at the back of our church as people arrive for our Friday night prayer meeting. It’s interesting to see the different attitudes upon arrival. Many are there out of duty, afraid to miss or seem backslidden. Others come to meet friends. But there is no mistaking those who enter to find God and do business in the heavens. You can sense the excitement of being with the saints

and praying together. That is the way we are supposed to arrive, with a hunger for the fellowship of the saints, with a hunger for the things of God.

Being Infectious

And lastly, the ultimate proof of a good diet will be seen in the area of evangelism. It will be seen here more than any other thing. Jeanette and I went for a brief holiday to the very same place that our friends Tom and Helen went to not long after. I was telling them that we had found a good restaurant when we were down there. I'm not interested in food and I never have been but this restaurant was so good that I was shocked. It was so excellent that I told them about it.

One of the sure signs of a good spiritual diet is that you are going to open your mouth and tell people about Jesus Christ everywhere and anywhere. You just can't hide that. It is just like good health, it is plain to see.

May God help us all establish and hold to a good and godly diet.

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In South America, there was a church of four or five hundred people led by a man called Cesar Castellanos. One day as he read the book of 1 John, he realised the power of being free from the world. As he looked at the church, he could see the people were not free; they were bound. He saw the freedom and called the whole church to read 1 John again and again. To his shock, the church quickly grew to 250,000 people, just by being set free.

Turn to 1 John 1:5-7.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we

have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Turn to 1 John 2:15-17.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what they have and do – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever.

Turn to 1 John 4:4.

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.

The whole book of 1 John is really about overcoming the world by walking in the light. I can't tell anybody to read 1 John without dealing with the following scripture because this is one huge scripture. Many believers have had a lot of grief over this one line.

Turn to 1 John 3:6.

No-one who is born of God keeps on sinning. No-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

You can read that scripture in many versions and they all say the same thing. It says that no one who is born of God sins. It is kind of scary. One lovely and godly woman came to me one morning with tears in her eyes and the Bible in her hands in reference to this scripture.

“Pastor, I can't be saved! Look at this! Anyone who is born again does not sin.”

At a first reading that is what it seems like, doesn't it? That is what it reads like. Many people over many years have had a lot of grief because of that scripture. Let me begin by telling you **not to build a doctrine on one line**. Number one, you have got a whole Bible; don't build a doctrine on one line of it. Let me list the many things people believe or positions people take when it comes to a Christian sinning.

Some believe:

- We *do not* sin
- We *should not* sin
- We *will not* sin
- We *must not* sin
- We *need not* sin
- We *cannot* sin

If you look at 1 John 1, you will see the other side of this issue. There John says that if we do sin, we have a God who is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins! We could go in a thousand directions with that one scripture. So don't build a doctrine on one line.

The second thing that I would say is that we are tripartite; **we are body, soul and spirit**. Your body sins; in fact, Paul called it the body of sin. Your soul most certainly sins. However, your spirit does not sin. The spirit within you is protected. It is pure and holy; it is God's deposit in you.

What John is referring to is he who *continues* in Christ. In the Greek, it is the continual present tense that can't be translated to English. In the Greek, he says that he who remains in Christ doesn't budge, he keeps his ground, he doesn't sin.

In other words it is a conditional statement, not a categorical statement. A categorical statement would be a statement that works every time in all

circumstances. It is not a categorical statement. The condition is the phrase, 'who lives in him'. It is a conditional statement.

If you walk with Christ, you won't go into sin. In fact, he backs up that very belief in chapter one where he says, "By the way, if we do sin, we have an advocate before the Father who is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins."

*Anyone who is born
of God need not sin
because you have
been set free.*

There are several right answers from the list on the previous page regarding views about sin, but my favourite one is "need not sin". Anyone who is born of God need not sin because you have been set free. You have got the empowering grace of God to walk free.

Apart from that one issue, the whole book of 1 John is about darkness and light, heaven and hell, and walking in the light. John is not confused about darkness and light. He is not confused about our direction and the way in which we should walk.

Basically, what happens to a believer at salvation is God picks you out of darkness and puts your feet on a road, a highway of holiness. A road is something to be travelled. And the idea is that you walk on in the light. The problem starts when Christians hang around instead of moving forward. The problem starts when we don't get any momentum going into the light but remain lingering where we should not be.

A born again guy rang me up one day panicking in a hospital.

"Pastor, I've been stabbed in the throat."

"What happened?"

"This mad woman stabbed me in the throat. I did nothing. Come help me and pray for me."

I went to the hospital and there was a big hole in his throat. I asked him how it happened. He said, “Nothing. I didn’t do anything.”

Who did it? “Just this woman.”

Who is she? “She was at my place.”

He was a single guy. What was she doing in your place? “I was having a party.”

Who was at the party? “Me and her.”

It was a small party then. Tell me who she is. “Just this girl I met.”

Where did you meet her? Then we finally got to it.

“In a nightclub.” That is darkness. The story didn’t start with a knife in your throat. The story started in the nightclub.

Let’s get back to the root. The problem for so many believers is that it starts when we linger around at that place, where we should not be. The Christian life is most definitely a walk into the light. As much as John says to *be* in the light, he says *walk* in the light. What he means by that is simply to walk towards the light. Don’t hang around in darkness.

Many Christians who would hang in that place are interested in one thing only and that is staying out of Hell. Some people just want to stay out of Hell. “Tell me the minimum that I need to do and I’ll linger on the cliff edge. As long as I stay out of Hell, then that’s alright.” But that denies everything in terms of ethics and principles of being a Christian.

Saved to Walk in the Light

A Christian is saved to walk in the light. But how do we walk in the light? There are six simple ways that we do that.

The first thing that we need to do is to **walk by the word of God**. You don't have to look very far to see that. David says the word "is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path." The world is a dark place so where is the light and where is the lamp? It is in the word of God.

I know that walking in the light sounds like Sunday school. But it is incredibly important. We actually do have a light, or a torch if you like; it's your bible. The sad thing is that people despise that and see it a bit like Sunday school.

It also means to **walk advisedly**. It means that when the scripture says something, I hear it and I obey it. I know that we are very good at hearing the word but we need to obey the word; to walk advisedly. It is not just to hear what I should do but also to carry that out.

A guy came to me several years ago during the beginning of the property boom in Ireland. He was in the process of selling his apartment and moving to buy another house. At that time we had bought and sold many houses, had made a lot of money and he wanted to get some advice before he made a decision.

So he came around, brought all of his facts and figures and said, "Look, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to sell our apartment and then I'm going to move here and I'm going to buy this house."

I looked over the figures and the property and said, "I wouldn't do that if I was you."

I asked him why he needed to sell his apartment. He had plenty of money. He was going to put a mortgage on his new house anyway. If he kept the

apartment he could rent it out and eventually get the capital gains on it. Plus in the meantime, the rent would have covered half his new mortgage.

I said, “Keep your apartment, put a deposit on the house and I would say in four or five years, you could have enough gain in both of those to have one completely paid off.”

He could see what I was saying but he said that he needed to think about it so off he went. I met him a few months later, “How’s it going?”

“I sold the apartment.”

Okay! He didn’t take the advice. He could see it. He could understand what I was saying but he was just not going to follow it through. In retrospect, he missed a fortune. We ended up debt-free in five years while he was stuck in a twenty-five year mortgage.

That’s not funny. That is very sad. That is terrible for a believer. I wasn’t just being academic about it. I was praying about it, looking into it and giving him, what I considered sensible pastoral, but business-like advice. Was he walking advisedly? Not at all. That is seeking the advice but not following it.

*Walking in the light
means the counsel of
God will guide my
decisions.*

Walking in the light means the counsel of God will guide my decisions. That man came to ask for the advice to know what he should do, but then couldn’t follow it through. That is not walking in the light.

Thirdly, walking in the light means **walking worthy**. This is a little bit more sacrificial; when it starts to hit home.

A girl came to me one day and said, “I’ve got a boyfriend!” Good! Who’s he then? “He’s a Muslim.” Not so good! I have got nothing against Muslims. In fact, I’ve got Muslim neighbours who are absolute gentlemen.

She said, “He’s lovely!” I was sure he was.

“Devout!” I was sure he was.

We started to shine some light on that situation. We looked at what Paul and Jesus said about being unequally yoked. Nothing against Muslims but she was a born again Christian. She had the light in her. That was what the Bible said.

“Can you see it?”

“Oh yeah.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I need time to think.”

That girl left our church. We didn’t hear from her or see her. I heard that she got married to that Muslim man. Months went by and the next thing I heard of that girl was from a member in the church. They were in the supermarket when a Muslim woman in a full burka came and said hello. But they could not see who it was until the girl introduced herself.

Walking in the light is an expensive thing. It is a sacrificial thing. Learn the rules and stick by the rules. Walking in the light means walking in accordance with the Bible. That is my torch. It is a dark world and I have been given a torch; a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

*It is a dark world and
I have been given a
torch; a lamp unto my
feet and a light unto
my path.*

It was clear that in both those incidents,

the people involved could have easily avoided the pain. I don't know where that girl will end up. God bless her. God help her. God save him and bring them into the kingdom. Have mercy on them even though they have made a mistake.

The light of God will reveal things about you that you don't want to know and you certainly don't want others to know. Walking in the light will **show up things you would rather not see**.

Have you ever seen those magnifying mirrors? I think the devil invented them. They are terrible things. These things blow you up and it is dreadful. You might think that you are alright until you get close to one of them.

The light of God is a bit like that. It is a quite uncomfortable. If we are willing, it is a good thing to do. It is the best thing that you could ever possibly do. David said that. He called on the light of God to search him.

The trouble with us is that as soon as the light starts to search us out and as soon as we become aware of our faults, we hide like Adam in the garden. There was no sin in Adam originally but as soon as he sinned he hid.

*Be aware of the fact
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in you.*

Be aware of the fact that the natural response of your flesh is to run and hide as soon as the light shows up a problem in you. You cannot live a Christian life like that. It is not freedom. It is a trap; it's actually bondage because you will keep your problems and they will never get dealt with.

Cover is a natural thing. It wasn't just Adam. That is why we shouldn't mock Muslims, Jews or anybody when they cover themselves as they pray. A Jew gets his shawl and tries to cover himself as he prays. All human beings know

that the light is there; they know that there is sin and just like Adam going to the bushes to hide from the awareness of his sin, so do the Muslims; so do Jews.

They are seeking something to cover themselves from the light of this God whom they suddenly become aware of. He is revealing them and they want to go back into the darkness. Light will reveal you and it will draw things out that you don't want to see and that you certainly don't want others to see.

C.S. Lewis, a great man, told a story of when he was a child. When he got a bad tooth, he wouldn't tell anybody. He would just suffer; he would sit with the pain and agony until his jaw started to swell. Why would you do that? Because you don't want to tell your Dad or your Mum. The first thing that they are going to say is, "Let's go to the dentist!" That is what we do. It is a natural inclination to pull back to try and to hide.

Fifthly, walking in the light will **let God's healing light in**. This doesn't apply to all of you. Not all of you have deeper problems or traumatic pasts but some of you will have. Some of you will have come from places where there was a lot of hurt, pain and trouble. So often that stuff eventually brings a Christian down because they don't want to bring it into the light. They may have many problems but they won't let you in; won't let you deal with them. That is no way to live.

Listen to this story: A boy goes out in life and he doesn't quite know how to deal with the hurts that come at him. He goes to school and this guy hurts him by calling him a name. He's got this hurt and doesn't know what to do with it. He decides to get a box and put it in a box. He closes the box and walks on.

Later on he leaves school, gets a job and somebody hurts him. Then he has another one. He wants to put it in the box but the box is too small, so he finds a bigger box to put it in. Further down the road he gets married and his wife hurts him. That's a bigger hurt and he searches for a bigger box.

The day comes when he comes across another hurt. The boy climbs up on top of the box, lifts the lid, throws in the hurt and says, "I'm going in as well this time, and he jumps into the box and closes the lid on himself. I'll just stay in here where it's dark because I don't want to deal with this stuff anymore."

It is called depression. People shut the lid on their lives, not willing to let you know what the issue is. God wants to open the box, not to expose you in any wrong way or to harm you, but to heal you.

*God wants to open
the box, not to
expose you in any
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harm you, but to*

Light has healing properties, literally. It has healing properties that are good for you as a human being. God calls us into that light. Don't hide; don't submerge your problems and live in there, blocking yourself off. That is a demonic and depressive thing. It is horrible. Let God in to lift you out of your past. Light is a wonderful thing.

Lastly, walking in the light means **walking towards the light**. It is not hanging around on cliff tops but actually walking towards the light. It is not Sunday school. It is incredibly expensive to walk in the light and to make the proper choices. Let me conclude with two examples; one of someone who walked in the light correctly and one of someone who didn't.

In the Vietnam War, there were two young soldiers rowing down the river in a boat. All of a sudden, a grenade was thrown into the boat. However, the boat had louvers in it and the grenade fell down in the louvers. They had about ten seconds to make up their mind about what they were going to do.

One of them looked at his friend and threw his body on top of the grenade. Boom! He died instantly but his friend lived. He was given a hero's funeral when they got his body back. But the mum and dad of that hero never did meet the boy whose life he had saved.

Years went by and it was just a niggling little thought in the back of their minds, “I would like to meet the man for whom my son died. I would like to meet him because he gave his life for him. He must be one good guy.”

In the end their curiosity got the better of them and they went to the army wanting to contact that man. So they phoned the guy up and invited him to dinner as a guest of honour in their home. He accepted the invitation.

They set their house up. They were all prepared, dressed smart and waiting for the man for whom their son died. One o’clock came and he didn’t show up. Quarter past one, he still hadn’t shown up. Then all of a sudden, a car stopped outside and out came a drunken guy. He walked up to the door.

“Are you mister and misses eh? I’ve come for the dinner! You mind if I smoke?”

“No, no.”

And the man plonked himself at the dinner table.

“Yeah, he was a great guy, yeah! Actually I’m not that hungry. You don’t mind if I don’t eat, do you?”

“No, no! It’s okay.”

He said, “Actually I’ve got to see somebody and I’ll have to shoot off. But thanks very much. All the best now!”

And he left. It is a true story. The father said to himself, “My God! My son died for that?”

That is not walking in the light, is it? That is not walking worthy. Even though someone had died for him, that soldier obviously had no appreciation of it. We must never be found guilty of anything like that.

Walking in the light means walking worthy of what we understand of this great sacrifice that Jesus Christ has made for us. Jesus thought that much of me. I will honour him.

I found this illustration of someone doing the right thing with their light and I thought it was fantastic. There were two sailing ships and one started to sink and was going down. It was pitch black in the middle of the night with heavy fog. They couldn't see, they could only hear the cries. They were trying to rescue as many as they could. But many were dying in the water.

There was an invalid in one of the cabins in the ship that was doing the rescuing. He couldn't walk but he could hear the men swimming and throwing ropes to save everyone outside. He thought, "I wish that I could do something, anything." But he couldn't because he was an invalid stuck in his cabin.

Then he thought of something. He had a lantern and there was a little portal. So he put his lamp against the window thinking that just maybe someone would see that light.

They came into port and many were saved but many died. They had a meeting in the church. In the church people who had been rescued got up to give their testimonies one after the other. At the back there was the invalid listening with everyone else.

*"It was just a bit of
light but God used
it!"*

One man got up and said, "I was in the water. I couldn't see a thing. All that I could hear were the screams. It was too dark and too much fog and then I saw it; a little lantern pressed against the window. I swam constantly for the one light that I

could see. Eventually someone plucked me out. It was just a little bit of light but God used it!”

Friend, you may not feel that you have much, but whatever light you have don’t hide it; let it *shine*.

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He who the son has set free is free indeed. Free from what? We are free from the law, free from the accusations of the law. We simplified it into the three concepts, the world, the flesh and the devil. As you go through life, the world tries to put stuff on us. It tries to leave us struggling with issues we pick up along the way. The flesh does the same thing.

For example, someone may go through life and pick up the habit of smoking. They have it in them. It becomes an addiction. I know because I smoked for over ten years. The devil had something in me. It started as a habit and it ended up as an addiction. When I got saved I had to bring that to Jesus and be set free from it. Just living in the world we can easily be carrying issues we picked up in life.

If I've got issues in me, it messes up my life, my relationships and then I can't fulfil my destiny. God has got a destiny for everyone. We refer to these issues as *baggage*. You often hear it referred to in Christian circles: "He has got so much baggage."

I wonder if you have got baggage. I wonder what your history and your past has been? I wonder how much emotional and spiritual junk is in your attitude? I can guarantee you that baggage from the past will spoil life. Baggage from the past can spoil any relationship.

"Oh Lord, give me a relationship!"

"I want a husband."

"I want a wife."

Hang on a minute. You have a little bit of unpacking to do. You are not ready. There is too much junk in there. You need to unpack some of these issues.

Packing Mentalities

People pack differently. Husbands and wives will certainly tell you this. In our house if we are going away for two days, for Jeanette that means ten pairs of shoes, five dresses, etc. I'll say "You don't need that."

"Yes, I do."

You might need to pause now and think back over your life and ask yourself what sort of packer you are. Frank Damazio has split the packers up into four categories.

First there is the **handbag type**. The handbag type person has problems which are not that big. They are manageable. The problem is that they always have them with them. It is like that person who has a bad temper. You don't often see it but you always know that it is there. "You can push me but just don't push me too far!"

It's not a massive or huge problem but they have carried it for twenty or thirty years. That will affect your relationships. The handbag type person, I think, gets fooled. The book of Proverbs has much to say about little attitudes. It puts it in loads of different ways such as, 'the fly that spoils the ointment'. It is a little attitude that can spoil your relationships.

People don't want to be around someone with a bad temper. The Bible says that we should have nothing to do with an angry man. Tiny little things that we think are not a problem really are. And they are always right at hand.

Secondly there is the **duffel bag type** of person. The duffel bag is the type of thing that you would take to college or to the gym. You wouldn't carry it every day. It is something that you would pack for an occasion. This type of person has problems that are bigger but that you can't see as often. It's the person that you don't want to meet at Christmas. It's the person that you don't want at a wedding or a funeral. They are the ones that will cause trouble but not every day.

It is not a handbag type situation. The problems are deep and when they bring that stuff out, everybody knows it. They will be quiet for six or twelve months but when they blow up, they do a lot of destruction and damage.

Thirdly there is the **suitcase type** person. This is very different from those first two ways of going through life. The suitcase type person really needs to stop for a minute. This person, in my opinion, is probably very nice. They might not have any problems in the church or in their relationships but over the course of life, they have picked up hurts and problems.

They get to a point in their life where they say that they are going to move and get out of their present circumstances. They are the sort of person who changes marriages, cities, and jobs because they can't quite seem to cope with all the junk that life puts in you. They don't know how to deal with it so the answer is always on the other side of the fence, where the grass is always greener.

You will certainly meet these people. In fact, when we conduct training for missionaries, one of the things we try to put in right at the beginning is that when they get to wherever they are going they will not be any more holy there than here. Many people have the perspective that life will be easier when they get on the mission field.

The fact is that it is often harder because you are out of your element. You have got to be careful of that type of suitcase, "I'm out of here", mentality. It is a "flight mode" mentality and it doesn't work.

One of the things that the suitcase type forgets is that when they leave the country, leave their job, or leave their marriage that you are going with you. You can't leave yourself behind. When you go to that new job you are going to have to turn around to that suitcase one day and you are going to have to open it up.

The last type of packer is the **trunk type** person. If you work with larger groups of people, you will soon know the trunk types. I know lots of these types. Once again they are normally nice people. They come to church every Sunday faithfully and never say a word. But it is discovered that they are a trunk type when you ask them to do something.

If you ask them if they would open their house for a small group in their area, their answer would be no. A few weeks later you ask them to usher because you're short on the ushering team. Their answer is no. These people are very faithful, in church every week but they keep themselves at a distance.

The trunk types have difficulty relating. There are reasons for that. When you dig beneath the surface what is it that has happened in your past that makes you so afraid to open yourself up and relate to other believers? It is the sort of person who has gathered up the hurts of life and has put them in a trunk. And it is only discovered that they are there when you talk about the future, destiny and where you're going to go.

So we have to think about what is in our bag. If you look inside yourself, and we are talking negatively just for the moment, what is in your life? What experiences have you picked up that you should have let go of?

The devil seeks to get something in your bag as it were. He would call it his ace card. Every time you try to go forward in life he would play his ace. He only needs one. If there is some emotional issue, then every time you try to move forward out comes the ace, out comes the issue that he has got in you. In terms of a hand bag, duffel bag, suitcase, or trunk, what is it that he has got in you?

In your case it might be your emotions. Maybe you find it hard to handle your emotions. You might still be angry at a particular person. You might still be very sad. You might be very bitter. You might still be in love with that person. There may be something in your emotions that the devil can play with. It could be sin. It could be mistakes in your past. It could be character flaws. It could be something that you greatly regret over what you did or said.

Abortion is a huge one today. There is also confused sexuality. That is becoming so much more common now because of the society in which we live. People can have addictions and habits. These things can creep up like a vine and choke the life of God out of you.

*The devil always seeks
that ace card; something
he can wind you up on.*

Understand what I mean about an ace because it is the whole point of what Jesus wants you to see in this study. The devil always seeks that ace card;

something he can wind you up on.

Jesus says that the prince of this world is coming and he's got nothing on him. Satan knows how to push your buttons. He knows your hot spot. Jesus didn't give him one. There was nothing in him because any one thing is one thing too many.

Who Packed Your Bag?

Assess your own history and see if there is anything in you. Who packed your bag in life? Every time I go to the airport they ask me who packed my bag. The fact is that I don't pack my bag actually. Somebody else does, Jeanette. I don't pack my bag.

The irony is that when you go through life you might think that you packed your bag but maybe you didn't. Who made you what you are? Joseph and Daniel were two individuals whose lives were unfair. Joseph hadn't done anything wrong and he ended up in prison. That was unfair. David hadn't done anything wrong; in fact, he had done everything right and Saul was trying to kill him. That was unfair.

That is life. Life is unfair and you can have a lot of different reactions to that. You have to be careful because **life experiences** will pack your bag for you.

I grew up in Belfast in the middle of a war zone with people being blown up, shot and killed; with hatred all around. Some of those we knew were in the Irish Republican Army. Two doors up from us was a friend who killed three people. There were guys all around us getting involved in that and letting life pack them with hatred. Watch it!

Other people can pack your bag. In fact, I was working with a man whom I felt very sorry for. His mother was not a very good mother. His mother had about five kids but she didn't like him. I'm sure that she loved all her children, she just didn't like him.

Every day when he was growing up she would treat the other children with respect but to him she would say, "You're stupid! You're nothing! You're never going to make anything of your life!" She would pile on that negativity year after year.

I met that guy when he was about thirty and he was living like a "waster". He was behaving as though he were useless. He had accepted the baggage that had been packed into his life. He was doing nothing and could see no future for himself. She packed his bag for him alright.

Who packed yours? Think back. It could have been your mum, your dad, or bullies at school. However, it is not supposed to affect your entire life. There should have been a clean out when you got saved.

Life experiences can push stuff on you that you are not supposed to accept. You can get rid of it right now. Other people can put stuff on you that you don't need to accept; friends, pastors or anybody. There is the **devil**, of course. He is constantly trying to make you a carrier, trying to put something in you.

Then there is **you**. You may never have paused to think about the junk of the past. This is such a practical issue as well as a spiritual issue. Two years ago we had two of the largest rubbish skips that you could imagine. Imagine the biggest skip that you could ever dream of. We filled two of them with junk from this church.

And we are now ready for another one because people keep bringing their stuff to the church. Don't dump it here. Just as junk is a practical problem for so many, it is also a spiritual problem. People can't seem to let go. "Don't

throw that out! That's my old pet hate, worry, concern, or attitude! That's me."

No. You are a new creation and you need to let that go.

Jesus said, "Cast your cares onto me." Cast your baggage onto Jesus for he cares for you. Don't carry that but let it go.

The Ultimate Baggage Handler

Turn to Luke 4:18, 19.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

These verses list some of the things that Jesus came to set us free from. For example, poverty. The word 'poor' here in the Greek has the widest connotation possible. In other words, Jesus is saying that if there is anything lacking in you, he can make that up in you. You need to give it to him of course. He says that he will heal the broken-hearted.

When you lose someone close to you, God gives you a thing called grief. Grief is a godly and beautiful thing. I cried my heart out when I buried my dad. It was like my insides were coming out. I grieved and wept and then I walked away. I went on to glorify God in my life. If you continue in that it is called depression. Depression is not from God.

Life does things to us. We get hurt and get broken hearts. Relationships break up, and people we love die. You must grieve and then let things go. He comes to give liberty to captives. That means anything that you are captive in: a habit, an addiction. He can give you liberty for that.

One of the issues that we've had to deal with here more than anything else is eating disorders: bulimia and anorexia. In girls and boys. There seems to be a lot of that around these days. You are not captive to that. Jesus Christ can set you free. He came to bring liberty to those who feel like captives. "I just can't stop doing it!" Yes you can! He came to bring recovery of sight to the blind. I love that one particularly because the phrase that is used in the Greek is, "second sight". It is another chance.

I speak to those of you who are fifty or older. He comes to give sight to the blind. You may have gone through life and now think, "that's it!"

God says, "Guess what! I can give you a second vision. I can give you a new start, a new horizon and something you never dreamed of."

He gives liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and he frees the oppressed. Oppressed by what? Sickness of any sort. When does all of this happen? It can happen right now.

You shouldn't put it off for another time. You don't have to do what you have always done. Right now take a piece of paper and write on it whatever it is in you that you want to give to God. Write what is in you that you never unpacked. Are they attitudes, emotions, unforgiveness, inabilities, habits, or problems?

What is in you that you know that you would like to get out? Get it out and unpack it onto that piece of paper. Then take your piece of paper and burn it or put it into the bin repenting from your heart and soul as you do. It's time to destroy the devil's ace.

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More people come to me on the topic of this chapter than any other issue. The topic is unforgiveness.

It's not that Christians are saying in a nasty way that they can't forgive this person or that person. Rather, many people come forward for prayer and counselling asking why they still feel so angry. They have been carrying this thing for years and want to know what is wrong with them. Have they not forgiven? They have tried, are they missing something?

That is so typical of believers. I find that born again Christians just want to forgive. Very often, however, we don't know how to go through the process of forgiveness. It is not that simple.

It goes like this. You get up, go to work and somebody says something or does something; somebody tells a lie about you or slanders you. You get hurt. It all starts with that offence.

Turn to Psalm 119:165.

“Great peace have those who love the law, and nothing shall offend them”. KJV

When the love of God is in us, nothing will be able to get into us. Nothing shall offend us. Yet, in our flesh, we take offence and something registers within us.

If we are not careful, that thing begins to get a grip of us and even though we may want to shift it, sometimes we just can't. That is based on my own personal experience. I had wanted to forgive and found it nigh on impossible at one point. I just couldn't find a way through and then finally, I found an answer.

Responding to Hurt

There are three ways that people respond when somebody hurts them, lies about them or slanders them. First of all, they **retaliate**. They can hit back and say something nasty to them. Secondly, they **can forgive and forget**. Thirdly, the most common, they can **swallow** it.

In my opinion, when most well-intentioned born again believers are hurt, they put blinkers on and swallow the hurt because they don't know the process of dealing with unforgiveness. They bury it alive.

That thing will fester and may actually turn into anger and then into bitterness. That anger may not come out against the person that you are angry

at. It can come out anywhere, at any time, at anyone. The bitterness that follows can flow through every part of your life.

Swallowing hurt and almost pretending it never happened is not the biblical way of dealing with the problem.

Characterising Unforgiveness

I want to give you a simple break down of what unforgiveness consists of.

Turn to Matthew 18:21-35.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

There are a lot of shocking and scary things in the Bible aren’t there? Here Jesus defines a characteristic of unforgiveness as **refusing to give to other people what Jesus has given to you**. Freely you have received forgiveness. Now freely give it to others.

Unforgiveness is like acid and it will burn through your system, affecting everything. It is astonishing what the Bible says about what bitterness does to the body. In Proverbs it says that anger and bitterness will rot your bones. We can all choose to forgive and to let go.

There are so many around the world who have suffered terribly. You hear horrific stories. One of the Assembly of God pastors in England had a daughter who was on the Pan Am flight that was blown up over Lockerbie.

The BBC couldn’t find anybody who had a relative on the plane until they found him. It was on the ten o’clock news that night. They stuck the camera in his face and asked, (I paraphrase), “What have you got to say?”

He said, “I want to tell the world that Jesus loves them and I want to tell the world...”

“What about your daughter?”

“My daughter was a Christian and Jesus loved my daughter. God will extend the same grace and forgiveness to whoever blew the plane up if they repent.”

You hear stories like that and it proves that **we have a choice**. Often you hear, “You don’t know what they did!” and, “You don’t know what she said!” Others have suffered a thousand times more and still found enough grace to say that they forgive. So can we.

It is a choice that we can make. It may result in self-inflicted pain. If you don’t forgive, you are hurting yourself. Somebody described it like, “drinking poison and expecting the other person to die”. That is a very good description. Holding onto unforgiveness means that **you can’t be the person that God wants you to be**. God has a dream for every one of us. You cannot fulfil that dream if you keep unforgiveness with you. It isn’t going to happen. You will not proceed in your walk with God.

Imagine that I am training to be a surgeon. I turn up properly attired to go into theatre. I then decide that I’m going to bring my cat in with me. So I arrive at the door with my cat.

They are going to tell me that I am welcome but the cat is not and unless I get rid of the cat, I am not going to proceed with the training. Unforgiveness will stop your progress in your Christian walk.

It is an **act of pride**. It is a severe act of pride because you are saying, “He did this to ME!” It’s about you. It is also a great act of rebellion.

Turn to Matthew 6:9-13.

“This, then, is how you should pray:

“‘Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.’”

All over the world Christians will pride themselves in knowing that prayer. There were no divisions in the original scripture. There were no chapter or verse numbers. You could ask most Christians what the next line and very few know it. Look at the next line, verse 14.

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

There is another scary scripture. Forgiveness is important. **God will not forgive my sins** if I don't, from my heart; forgive anyone and everyone who has sinned against me. You can't get much more serious than that.

Turn to Mark 11:22-25.

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against

anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

To say that unforgiveness will **affect your prayer life** is really an understatement. Those great promises that Jesus gives there, ‘ask and you shall receive’, are based upon forgiveness. They are based upon you constantly keeping short accounts with those you feel have hurt you, offended you or sinned against you. It will certainly affect your prayer life.

It says in Matthew 5 that unforgiveness will **affect your worship**. Jesus says that if anyone comes to the altar to bring worship or an offering and if you remember that someone is mad at you, stop and make peace with them before giving your worship or offering. In the same way, if you remember that you are mad at someone, stop and sort it all out first. Try and make peace with everyone before coming and worshipping and bringing your offering. .

How can we tell people about the love of God and his forgiveness if we are not forgiving? We can’t do that. The lost are very discerning and pick up so quickly if we have the right spirit. Unforgiveness therefore **prevents us from witnessing effectively**.

Unforgiveness will also **affect your finances**. This is where people will laugh and say, “Oh, come on! How can not forgiving someone affect my finances?”

Well, you see, forgiving is one of the “givings” of the bible. There is *thanksgiving*. There is *faith giving*. There are all sorts of *givings* that the Christian is or should be engaged in. *Forgiving* is one of them.

It will block your finances because a person who won’t easily forgive won’t easily give. Your spirit is the same funnel from which your giving is poured out from. If your forgiving spirit is blocked, then your giving spirit is blocked.

You will find that people who are not generous in forgiveness are not generous in giving or in any other area of their life. If you are not going to

sow then you are not going to reap. So unforgiveness will definitely block your finances.

You will find Christians who have stood still for decades. Sometimes, the cause of **stunted spiritual growth** is unforgiveness. If you sit them down and go back through their lives, you will often find some point at which they got stuck. You will often find some point at which a rift happened and they were not able to put that right.

Resolving Unforgiveness

Is there a cure for unforgiveness? Yes there is. The first thing that I would suggest is to **take it seriously**.

I have a very close friend in ministry called Peter Finch. I have worked with him for a long time. He was my senior pastor for over ten years. We are still very close. Over the years, we hardly had any trouble with one another. We got on very well.

Then one day we had an argument. Now, you can have an argument with your wife, your husband, your flatmate; but believe me, when you have an argument with the person who is over you in the Lord then you have got problems. It is different from everything else, scripturally and spiritually. It is a completely different world that you enter into when you argue with someone over you.

We had this argument on the phone. I was in the city centre and he was at home. I was out of sorts. How could I pray? How could I live? So I got on a bus, travelled up to Peter's house and knocked on his door.

He was shocked. "What are you doing?"

“I’m here because we had an argument and I can’t live my life, pray or anything whilst I’m out of sorts with you.”

He said, “Okay, come in.”

I sat down and said, “Peter, I’m sorry. If there is anything that I said...but I see it this way.”

He is an extremely gracious man and he was extremely gracious then. He said, “Okay. Let’s just drop it.”

And we did. We let it go. He was saying to me, “It doesn’t matter.”

What did you mean, it doesn’t matter? I took it seriously. There was a rift between us and I couldn’t live like that.

The person who has hurt you or the person whom you have hurt may not care but you need to if you have been affected. Remember Jesus put it both ways. He said to put it right if anyone has anything against you, and also if you have anything against another.

Assume full responsibility, even if it may not even be your fault. You can do that. Be the peace maker. **Confess your faults** honestly, acknowledge it as sin. Remember, it may sound like Sunday school but understand this, do not treat people the way you have treated you.

Have people treated you badly? Have they lied about you? Do not lie back. Don’t treat others the way they have treated you. Don’t seek revenge but rather do the exact opposite.

Confess your sin and relieve yourself of that horrible unforgiveness. Acknowledge it as sin, lay down that anger. You may need to go to someone and say that you are sorry. I hope that you can be bold enough to do that.

When I got saved I had offended many people over the years but there were two people whose lives I had really had messed up. I was incredibly sorry. I had just been born again and I didn't know which way was up but I did know that I had hurt them. They hated me.

In fact, I thought that one of them would physically attack me if he ever saw me. So I wrote them each a letter. "I'm born again now. And I was very bad to you and I am very sorry. Would you please forgive me?"

Late at night, I popped those letters through their doors. To my shock, both of those individuals came to see me separately. Neither knew what I was doing with the other. They both walked in with the letter in hand.

One held the letter in his hand and said, "What's this?"

I said, "I'm sorry." In fact, he left saying, "Maybe there is a God!"

Both forgiveness and unforgiveness are powerful tools. One destroys but the other heals.

*Both forgiveness and
unforgiveness are
powerful tools. One
destroys but the other
heals.*

There were nine in my family. You can imagine a family of nine. You are going to have a rough and tumble here and there. As I was growing up my mum used to say pretty often, "Michael never holds anything against anyone." That was how I was. It wasn't a problem and I didn't have an issue with it until I got saved.

When I got saved, the thing that was a strength as a lost person became a weakness as a believer. I didn't expect that. What I was good at when I was lost, I found major issues with when I was saved. There was this one guy who had really hurt me. Try as I might to get it

out of my system, it was always there. I was angry. I would pray and say, “I forgive. I forgive.”

I struggled so much so that I went to seek counsel. I asked, “What is the problem with me? I’ve said that I was sorry and have asked for forgiveness. But somehow I know that that thing is in me and I don’t want it in me.”

One day I was sitting in a meeting and this guy who had really offended me was there. He happened to make a comment that he was in financial trouble. Suddenly, everything made sense.

Jesus said, “Do good to those who hurt you. Love your enemies.” That day really changed me permanently. When I heard that he was in trouble financially, I went and got some money. I gave it to him through a mutual friend and told her not to tell him that it came from me.

I can tell you from personal experience as someone who struggled to forgive, it wasn’t because I didn’t want to. It was because I didn’t know how to **love my enemies** and to do good to those who spitefully use and persecute me. I didn’t do that. I didn’t obey the simplest of commands.

On that day when I handed over the cash, all that I can say is that goodness that entered me. I could feel it and it was great. It was freedom. At last it was out. Do good to those who spitefully use you. Love your enemies. It is the simplest of commands but we overlook it. For me, that was my deliverance.

Forgiving, Step by Step

So if you have not done so before, take these four steps to freedom from unforgiveness. Forgiveness functions on four levels at all times or really does not work at all. Firstly, I must accept the forgiveness God offers me. I must **repent and receive forgiveness**.

Secondly, I must learn to **forgive myself**. God is not shocked when we are bad. I was the ninth child in our family so when I wanted to manipulate my mother I would throw myself on the ground and scream. I would stomp my feet. My mother would say, “Number nine, it isn’t going to work. It didn’t work for number one. It didn’t work for number two and it certainly isn’t going to work for you.”

Your sin is not a shock to God. You are not some horror to him. The problem is not at God’s end. God has forgiven you. He has totally paid for your sin but you must forgive yourself. If you don’t forgive yourself then you are not going to have anything to give to others. You need to be liberated yourself. You are forgiven.

Thirdly if you find yourself with anger towards God as many do, **forgive God**. It’s not that God has done you harm. But misunderstandings can lead to great distance in life between man and his God.

Lastly, now you are **free to give forgiveness**. Let those around you enjoy the grace you give, and want to know the God you know.

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Let's read Proverbs 25:28.

“Whoever has no control over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”

Let me explain what that means. It is so easy to read over it and not see it. In days of old, a city was protected by its walls. People were kept safe that way. It was actually a very effective way of being protected.

However, if there was a breach in the wall, the people became very vulnerable. They were weak because the enemy could actually enter through that breach anytime he wanted. They could defend the rest of the wall but as long as there was a weakness then that was it. There was a permanent flaw there.

This scripture is not talking about a city; it is talking about us as believers. It is a good piece of advice. Even if there is one weakness that can gain mastery over you, you must not tolerate it.

One of the easiest ways to see this problem is in relation to anger. Some people have a severe anger problem. They can have outbursts of anger. The telltale sign is that they will be perfectly calm, then something will trigger an outburst.

*Even if there is one
weakness that can
gain mastery over
you, you must not
tolerate it.*

Suddenly, like a city without walls, they succumb to a weakness. The breach in the wall becomes an avenue for the entry of a bad spirit.

It is never a good sign when you see a believer suddenly change. It means that there is an entry point in your life. It only takes one gap. The point of this study is to close those gaps; to find out what weaknesses are in us.

In this chapter we will look specifically at impatience. This is just an example and the way that we handle this weakness can be applied to most, if not all other weaknesses.

I don't know if you would consider yourself an impatient person. I certainly had an issue with this. Everybody is different. Different things make different people impatient. For some people it is queues, for some it is technology, for some it is bad service in a restaurant and for some people it is people.

Ask yourself, "Am I impatient in anything?" One of the things that really gets me is when I am standing in the queue at the supermarket. I have all of my stuff and there is usually a woman ahead of me. She'll put all of her things down, and she'll just stand there. She doesn't get her money out. She stands there while the cashier pulls everything through.

I'm thinking, "You should be getting your money out." Then the cashier tells her the amount and the woman says, "Okay," and then she goes for her money. It drives me nuts.

*A patient person
will be patient in
all circumstances.*

Different things will affect all of us. But it's important to accept that a patient person will be patient in all circumstances, not just a chosen few. I can't say that I am patient with Jeanette and then be impatient in the queue and then call myself a patient man. A patient man would be patient everywhere. It is an all-pervasive

thing.

Patience by Definition

Let's look at what patience is and what it isn't because I think that it is a bit of a slippery fish.

From Hebrews 6:9-15, we can understand that we will inherit the promises of God by faith and patience. Do you want to inherit the promises of God? How are you going to do it? One of the most common things that people will say to you is that it is by faith. They rarely mention the patience part. It is by faith *and* patience that we inherit the promises of God.

There is currently a TV series called, "Leaders" where they invite key leaders from around the world and ask them how they achieved their success. One man said, "The difference between a successful business man and an unsuccessful one is most often patience." It wasn't just about being clever. He said, "People give up. They back out too quick."

Someone described patience as "a calm response to stress". It is the will to wait without anger or frustration. David said, "I waited patiently." He didn't just wait. To be waiting on something doesn't necessarily have anything to do with patience. You can wait very angrily.

Just to begin with let's get some of the things that patience is not out of our system so that we can understand what patience is. Patience is **not a natural trait**.

Jeanette is extremely patient. She is probably one of the most patient people I have ever met. She is long suffering. She's really got that grace. It would be so easy for me to say, "We're different. She's patient. I'm not. That's life."

It is not so easy because she wasn't born that way. When she was a baby and she wanted fed she didn't say, "Mummy and Daddy are tired. I won't cry now." She cried like any other baby.

When she grew up she threw temper tantrums. She did all of the normal things. So how come she is patient now and I am not? You *learn* patience. It is a fruit, not a gift.

*You learn
patience. It is a
fruit, not a gift.*

Some people have learned patience. They have taken it on board. They have been taught that by looking at scriptures or by parents for example, and through the development of their character they have brought that fruit out.

You can't say that patience is a trait because it is a fruit of the spirit. It **isn't being indifferent or weak**. This is a very common misconception and one that you see all of the time. You see bad parenting, where a parent will not discipline or look after the children.

The parent will often excuse themselves by saying, "I'm being so patient." No! They are being weak. That is not patience.

Patience is **not avoiding adversity or trouble** because there is a lot of trouble in life.

Having patience **doesn't mean that you will never be angry**. We get this idea that a patient person is always calm and would never disturb a fly. That is not true. There is a righteous anger.

Remember Eli with his two sons. He was a bad father. It says that Eli sat back on his chair while the boys were living very badly. It was a terrible situation. He would have sat and said, "I'm being such a patient father." No! That is weakness.

There should have been a righteous indignation in him. He should have gone after those boys and corrected them. A patient person could have done that. It **doesn't mean that you will always be calm**.

Patience is the ability to let go, especially of immediate gratification. Patience is the acceptance of God's will. Is it okay if God says no to you? You know that thing that you were praying for, that thing that you were really wanting? Is it okay if God says no on that one?

Patience is a **calm acceptance of what God gives or what he doesn't give**. Patience is also an **acceptance of the circumstances or the promises of God without giving him deadlines**. I encounter people giving me deadlines all the time. They say, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to give God until the 31st of the month and if he doesn't act by then I'm off."

I would be very cautious about setting God deadlines because most often, it doesn't do any good. It didn't do Saul any good did it when Samuel didn't turn up. He lost his destiny because God wasn't quick enough for him.

"If he's not here within these seven days then I'm going to go and do what I want."

What people actually mean by setting deadlines is that if God doesn't move by that set time, they are going to go and do what they want to do. That is the truth beneath that kind of thinking.

You need patience for ministry and in all the areas that you are involved in. It is a crucial element. The pastor of a church that I was overseeing rang me up one day. He said, “I need to meet you. I’m sending someone to get you.”

It was a little bit of a mystery to me. This guy came and picked me up. We went and picked up another elder. I was thinking, “What’s going on?”

They took me to a place and all of the elders of the church were there. I walked in and sat down. They had all the accounts of the church and all the paperwork out. The pastor said, “Pastor Mike, we’re giving the church back to you.”

He was terrified. “We can’t handle it. We can’t work with these people. They are rebellious and cheeky. They don’t follow our rules. We have tried everything. We’re giving it back to you. You take it.”

Rather than respond to him, I listened to what the other elders had to say. It was pretty much the same. When they all finished, I took the church materials, stood up and walked over to that pastor and put them back in his lap.

I said, “You’re not giving me the church. I don’t receive it and I don’t accept it. You need to be patient with your people. You need to work with them and love them. You need to sacrifice in whatever way you need to. You need to get on with the job.

“We could all hand it in. I don’t have that privilege. You’ve got what you got and you need to work with them. So I’m going to pretend that this meeting never happened. You guys stay here. I’m leaving. As far as I’m concerned, you carry on.”

I went outside and thought, “Oh Lord, I wonder what’s going to happen?”

The next week they turned up to church as usual. That pastor went on to triple the size of that church. Not only that but he sent a team to another city and planted another church of three hundred. He was perfectly capable of leading that church. He just needed to be told so. He needed to be patient.

Patience **doesn't live alone**. It comes out of other traits and other attributes that you must cultivate within you. Just as each instrument works together in an orchestra so each attribute of God when cultivated and working in us produces good fruit. There is a great example of this.

Turn to 1 Samuel 26:7-11.

So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice."

But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go"

This is just a fantastic story. Saul was king and he should have stepped aside and let David become king. But he was too proud to do that. Imagine the situation that David was in. The men were gathered around, Saul was asleep. He had this very moment, "Just kill him!"

But David didn't take the bait. He paused and waited. He knew better. He was extremely patient with Saul. He didn't kill him and he stopped the men from killing him. In another we read how he cuts a corner off from his robe and

was even grieved that he did that to the king. You need to see something about the patience that David exercised.

We call a loaf of bread, bread. But what makes bread, bread? Bread is made up of many things; water, flour, yeast and so on. Many different ingredients go into producing bread. So it is with patience.

David didn't kill Saul because David had faith that God would deliver him. David's faith produced patience. He didn't only have faith. That wasn't the only ingredient. David loved the Lord and indeed loved Saul. He had a mixture of faith and love together with wisdom to know that there was a way out of that situation, and courage to stand up to the men who were demanding that he kill Saul.

It was all of these things mixed together that actually produced patience in David. Patience doesn't live alone. It is not an isolated thing. It is created within us as we put into practice these different attributes of God.

The Importance of Being Patient

Patience is **essential for obedience to God**. We cannot fulfil the plan of God without patience. Has God given you a promise? I hope that he has. If you haven't got one, then seek his vision for your life. How are you going to fulfil that promise? It is by faith; but not by faith alone but by faith *and* patience.

What is precious in your heart? What is your dream or your vision? Five or six years ago, I came to New Mercy Church in Glasgow for the first time as a visitor. I fell in love with this place. I was absolutely head over heels smitten. I believed with all of my heart, it was almost like a promise, that God would one day move us to Glasgow.

But I had a full time job. I was working in the church in Dublin. I had an overseer and I was in a structure. In this situation, how do you achieve the promises of God and how do you pursue them?

I went back to my structure and said to my boss, Pastor Rick Seward, “I was in Glasgow and it was good. Pastor Rick, I honestly believe that God has called me to that place.”

He gave me a very quick response, “You need to focus on your work.” We were involved in a huge project at that time. I said, “Okay!”

I turned and talked to God. I said, “I will not only get on with my work, I will do the best job ever. And I will die doing this job rather than break your structure.” There is a right way and a wrong way to do everything.

You don’t have to break God’s principles to achieve God’s goals. If you will just be patient and have faith and trust and the courage to stand back, you will see God work as David did when he became king. By faith and patience, we will inherit the promises of God.

So I kept my mouth shut at that time. That is crucial. Bite your tongue. Shut up and do your job. I worked away in Dublin for about a year and a half. Nothing happened.

Then one day, as Pastor Rick and I were driving down a freeway in Los Angeles, he said out of the blue, “The guy we are going to see right now is the guy that I am giving the church in Glasgow to.”

“What?” I thought. His phone rang and we couldn’t continue the conversation. We arrived at the church; it was a big church of about two thousand people. We met with the pastor. My flesh was rising in me that day.

When everything was over, I chose my moment and turned to the pastor and said, “You love Glasgow then, do you?” And it was such a telling question. It was like a father asking the prospective groom, “So you love my daughter, do you?”

He could not hide from the intensity of that question. He couldn't answer it. He actually fell apart. And he answered honestly, as some people do when they are caught off guard, "No, I would not say that I love Glasgow but I would be happy to go for a short time as my relatives are from there. But I certainly wouldn't like to stay there."

I thought, "Praise God! That is the answer I was waiting for."

We went outside and got into the car. Pastor Rick started the engine and said, "He's not the guy."

I said, "I know!"

It was two years of keeping my mouth shut and obeying God's structure before I was able to move to Glasgow. I was being tested.

You are being put through the mill to see if you have any faith, to see if you believe the word that was spoken to you and to see if you will honour the structure. The bigger the trust the longer the wait and the more the testing it will be. The greater the thing that God is offering to you, the greater the wait is going to be. In that waiting you are tested.

*The bigger the
trust, the longer
the wait and the
more testing it
will be.*

If you do not pass the test then you are out, like thousands before you. You need faith but it is not the only thing for inheriting the promises of God.

Let me tell you that I have messed up many times with God. God would offer me something and I would run after it like Moses and kill the Egyptian. Then God would offer me something else and I would mess that up.

When I came here, for the first time in my life, I said to myself, "I am not going to mess this up. Now I know what the structure is. I know that I must

obey human beings. I must obey my pastors. Then God will see me through.” There are an awful lot of people out there who don’t see that, don’t understand that and then spend their life missing the goal of God for them.

We also need to see that patience is important for **relationships**. We all want to have love in our lives. We want to be loved. We want to love someone. We can’t do that without patience. In 1 Corinthians 13, it says that “love is patient”, among other things. It is one of those ingredients. So if we do not have patience, we will not have a healthy, wholesome love in any relationship. Patience also helps you **gain the respect of others**. It is a great form of protection because it holds you back from running ahead of God and getting yourself in trouble. You will certainly see the value of God’s timing through it.

Instead of a life that is jumping about from one thing to another, a patient heart in you will **create a stable consistent life**. It will enable you to **endure suffering**. If suffering comes your way then you will be able to go through that because you have developed patience. Develop these traits in peace time because you will need them in times of war. Cultivate them in good days and then you will be ready for the battle.

In conclusion, I ask that you be patient with yourself and patient with God. There is a t-shirt that says, “God isn’t finished with me yet!” God is not finished with you yet. You are a work in progress every day of your life. You need to be patient with God and yourself. If we do these two things, we will then be patient with other people.

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There is a t-shirt that you often see that says, “No Fear!” Sometimes you’ll see a car with a “No Fear!” bumper sticker. That car is normally travelling at about 150 miles per hour in the fast lane and “No Fear!” is the wrong statement in that scenario because that driver actually has a lot to fear.

You can trivially say that you have no fears but truth be told, there are a lot of fears around. When you look at your decision-making and the way that you behave, then you will probably find that there are a few fears there. For instance, a promotion at work that you could have gone for or another set of training that you could have done but you chose not to.

Why did you choose not to do that? Why did others advance when you stood still? Were you frightened of something? Why didn’t you tell that guy or that girl that you fancy that you liked him or her?

Fear can block your career. Fear can definitely affect your relationships and as for ministry, we could talk for a very long time about how fear affects people and prevents them from advancing in ministry.

The Top Ten Fears

The top ten list of fears in the world tends to change over time. The number one fear is not death, is not hell but public speaking. The number two fear is poverty; number three is illness; number four is criticism; number five is rejection; number six is getting old and on and on the list of fears go.

Fears change however, as you grow older. Someone who is twenty years old would fear very different things than someone who is forty or fifty or sixty. As life goes by, the things that challenge you change.

*Fears change
however, as you grow
older.*

My mother is 88 years old and she is just learning how to be single. Her husband has just died after sixty years of marriage. You would think that by 88 you would have experienced nearly every fear there is. Now even at that age there is a fresh fear and something that she is going to have to cope with. She is coping very well.

Fear is not something that we are going to put behind us permanently but we are always going to have to face it. We would be wise to build into our thinking some principles on how to deal with it.

To begin with there are healthy fears and there are unhealthy fears. If I am walking along a cliff and get frightened that I'm going to fall over, that is a very healthy fear. It will save you from catastrophe. It is the unhealthy fears that we will look at right now; focusing on how they enter us.

The Entry Points of Fear

Genesis 3:8-10 shows us the first entry point of fear.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

The first mention of fear in the Bible follows the first mention of sin. The primary entry point of fear into your life today is **sin**. "I heard you in the garden and I was *afraid*."

*Fear is increasing
monumentally
because sin is
increasing
monumentally.*

It still works on us today. If we sin, then fear increases in our lives and in our minds. Scripture is very clear that fear has got to do with judgement. A heart that knows that it has sinned fears the judgement of God. Fear is connected with sin because it is connected with judgement.

Do you think that fear is increasing or decreasing in the world? It is increasing monumentally because sin is increasing monumentally. In the last days sin will abound. The more sin that exists on this planet the more fear that is also going to be on earth. We need to be able to deal with fear more than any previous generation.

Sin will abound and fear will also abound. So entry point number one of fear into the human race is sin.

The second entry point can be your **parents**. You may have picked up certain fears from them. Say that your mother has a fear of spiders. She is carrying

you around the house as a baby, she sees a spider and she throws you up in the air. If this happens once a week or so, you will probably grow up with an unnatural fear of spiders.

The mother may have a fear but the child will have a *phobia*. The effect increases through the generations. There are all kinds of things that you can pick up from your parents that God would not want you to have that can limit you and debilitate you.

The mother may have a fear, but the child will have a phobia.

You need to tease them out and see if they affect you. If you came from a house where there had been a divorce, that might really mess up your thinking. You have got to be careful of that. It can affect people so profoundly. They can start to think that because their mother and father were divorced that it could happen to them as well.

Fear progressively takes its grip; It starts with a *thought*, then grows into an *imagination* and if left unchecked, will become your *reality*.

Turn to Job 3:25.

What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.

Fear starts with a thought, then grows into an imagination, and if left unchecked, will become your reality.

There is a progression that fear takes. It starts with **thoughts**. You have got to be careful what you think about. You have got to be careful about what you dwell on because after a thought of fear of something enters your mind, the temptation of the devil to you is to cause you to entertain it. We are warned not to

do that. If you entertain it then it will take root in your system.

That is a great word in the Bible isn't it? If I am *entertaining* someone, what do I do? I invite you to my house, I take you in, I sit you down, I give you a meal and I converse. The Bible warns us not to entertain thoughts that contradict God's word.

In other words, don't take thoughts of fear into your mind and think about and dwell on them. It starts with a fearful thought but if you are foolish and you start to dwell on that thought, it follows that you will have all sorts of fearful imaginations about that circumstance. That is no good because the end result will be that it will become your reality.

I was preaching a series on Healing once in a church. In the middle of my message, I happened to say that Jeanette and I don't get sick. In about twenty years, I could remember one time in which I had the flu and that was about it. I carried on with my message. At the end of the sermon, another pastor came up to me and said, "Hey! You do know what you said, don't you?"

I said, "What?"

"You said that you don't get sick."

"Yeah?"

"You shouldn't have said that."

"Why?"

"Because the devil is going to get you now. I know a man who said that and he and his wife died horrible deaths."

I remember very clearly my reply to him. "I have no investment in what you have just said. You can invest in it all you want. And you can let it be a fearful

thought. You can let it be an imagination of sickness but I don't want it. I choose not to think about that and to dwell on that.

"The scriptures say, "God is my life. God is my health. That is where my faith will be."

It was a funny story but it didn't end in a funny way. Guess who got sick? That which he feared the most ended up coming upon him. In fact, it put him completely out of ministry. I remember going to his house to pray for him as he lay on the couch unable to get up.

Someone will come to a pastor and say; "No one in this church likes me."

"Really? Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Nobody ever talks to me."

"Listen!" That is absolute nonsense! That is your imagination."

"Oh, but so and so was walking down the hall and they didn't say good-bye!"

"They're busy. You're imagining things."

It began with a thought that maybe you didn't fit in and you entertained that thought. Then you started imagining that people were ignoring you when they were not. Now it had become a reality. For such people often cannot receive the love that God tries to give to them.

A poor **self-image** is also a source of fear entering our lives. Life happens, doesn't it? It is all in how you view your situation. You could have had a bad past but make the best of every situation.

There was a guy on holiday once in America. He went into a fantastic church with a great pastor. The pastor said in the middle of his message, “My brother is a homeless alcoholic.”

The visitor thought, “There you have one brother who is a conqueror and the other one who is a homeless alcoholic.”

His curiosity got the better of him and he went to the pastor and said, “That was interesting what you said about your brother. You have a great church here. What do you think happened to you? Tell me about your past.”

That pastor said this, “My father was a chronic alcoholic. When I grew up in that situation, I made a decision that that type of life was never going to happen to me.”

That visitor went out and found that pastor’s brother, the homeless alcoholic and said, “I was at church today talking to your brother. Why do you think you ended up here?”

“My Father was an alcoholic,” he said.

He gave exactly the same answer.

They were two brothers putting their faith in different things. One thought negatively, “My dad was an alcoholic; therefore automatically I’m going to be too.”

*Negative faith brings in fears
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Negative faith brings in fears and creates a negative self image that will become your reality if you’re not careful.

A group of Christians went to Egypt recently and they were being led up a narrow passage inside a pyramid by a tour guide. One woman was in the middle of the train of people. She had never been in that type of situation before. She had never in her life had a problem with confined spaces; it had never entered her mind.

Half way up the pyramid something seized her and she froze. The staff there were pretty used to that sort of thing. They brought the people out backwards.

From that moment on she was never the same. She developed a fear of confined spaces. **Trauma** was the entry point.

If there a point in your life where prior to it you didn't have a fear with this or that, then you need to consider if that was an entry point for some fear. If such a thing has happened to you in any area, if something has been lost of your freedom, go back to that original place and assess how that entry point appeared.

How Spiritual Fears Develop

We must be aware that there are spiritual entry points of fear into our lives. The primary one would be **ignorance of God's word**. Over the years I have had many people make appointments to see me and they are crying about this or depressed about that. Ignorance of God's word is a massive source of fear.

"Oh pastor, I think I've lost my salvation!"

"Why?"

"Oh, because of masturbation."

"What's wrong?"

"I can't stop masturbating. I've lost my salvation."

As you listen, you suddenly understand that people don't know God because of their ignorance of God's word. To person after person you have to say, "Listen, you have sinned. But God is a good God. Hebrews says we have a high priest who is sympathetic with our weakness. Where's grace? You never mentioned grace."

Ignorance of God's word can see people go through years of self-doubt and doubt God's goodness. If you disobey God's word in a deliberate way, the scriptures says, the wicked man flees when no one pursues him.

Overcoming Fear Through Christ

When I got saved, I had a small speech impediment. I made this agreement, and I was naive but honest, with God and said, "Thank you for saving me. I will serve in the church in whatever way. There is just one agreement between you and me. I will never have to speak in public, right God?"

That was my agreement and I made it with true sincerity. I carried on and it was a very short time later when I got a word from the Lord, "Preach!" It was a real word. I knew that it had come from beyond the beyond, it had come from God. I was *frightened*.

Then I was in a position that many of you will be in. Between me and my future is fear. It took me weeks of crying, praying, seeking and walking through the park. "God, why did you ask me to do that?"

One day our church was having an outreach at which I was going to have to preach a short gospel message. But due to the weather, it was unclear whether it would happen or not. It was up to me. I was terrified because I was going to have to preach on the street. I went into the church corridor full of fear.

I crossed a line that day because I opened the door of the church hall and shouted, “We go in ten minutes!” I was never the same. I was still frightened and a bit shaky on the street, but I crossed the line.

I entered my life. I found myself. I found the me that God had predestined; my purpose and destiny. I know what it is like on both sides of that line.

Many will say, “I think that God has called me to be this. I think that God has called me to do that.” But fear stands between them and their ministry. Sooner or later they have got to face it.

There used to be this guy who picked on me in school. He would come over and smack me. I didn’t suffer with bullies but this guy just had it in for me. His name was Jim. One day I turned to him and said, “I’m going to fight you.”

“You’re going to fight me?”

“Yeah! I’m going to fight you! I’ll meet you tomorrow morning.”

The next day, I thought, “What did I do that for?” I was standing there when he came along with his mate. He took his coat off and said, “Right, you ready?”

He beat the living daylights out of me; but he never touched me again. From that point on he respected me. He would sit beside me, “You alright?” He would seek me out in the playground at break time just to spend time with me. We became close and we got to like each other.

In that situation I had thought, “I don’t care if I do lose! It’s better than being threatened by you. I don’t care if you do beat me up. What is important is that I fight back. It’s important to me because I am not going to be subject to you like this.”

It was the same as when I stood in church that morning, preparing to preach for the first time. “What am I going to do? Am I going to be standing and hiding in the shadows for the rest of my life?” No I wasn’t.

Fear stifles your ability to grow and to enter the kingdom. I am sharing as someone who has been on both sides of that line. I know what it is like to come out of it. Whatever God has called you to, don’t let the devil rob you of that. Start to fight back.

*Whatever God has
called you to do,
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fight back.*

Let me give you an example of fighting fear by **calling the devil’s bluff**. There was a man walking down a country road and he was on his way to his destiny which was a village. As he started to approach, there was a huge giant in the way.

He cried out to the giant, “What’s your name?”

The ogre shouted back, “I am fear!” The man wondered how he was going to cope. “I want to get where I’m going. What do I do?”

He said, “I know what I’ll do. I’ll take one step at a time.”

So he took one step and he noticed that this ogre shrank a little bit. He took another step and the ogre shrank another little bit. With every step that he took nearer that ogre (that fear), it diminished. It came to the point that as he got very close, the ogre was only a few inches high. That is the nature of the bluff of the devil concerning fear.

When you die and you stand before Jesus Christ, you will see all these stupid little fears and think, “Is that it? Is that cancer? You’re joking me! Was that my fear? Oh Lord forgive me!”

Open my eyes now! Let me not have to wait until I die. Let me see now how big God is. He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world. God, bring on the day when we can say, "He's got nothing in me!"

So assess yourself. See what fears you have got. Call the devil's bluff. Believe what you read in the word. We say it all the time; now start believing and acting on it.

Turn to 2 Timothy 1:7.

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

God did not give you a spirit of fear. The following is a list of the names of God. I want to explain to you how you can use these names. You can use this to fight the devil off.

Once again, if I could use a school yard example of two kids getting into a fight or something you will often hear those kids say, "My daddy is bigger than your daddy!"

That is a good statement for us to adopt because your daddy, your Abba Father, is greater than the devil. Scripture is fantastic because it gives you a whole load of keys to use in various situations of fear. Remember that the fear you face when you are twenty is going to be completely different from the fear when you are forty. You are going to have to learn to deal with it as a principle so that you can cope with it as you move through life.

1. *Elohim: The Creator*
2. *El Elyon: The God Most High*
3. *El Roi: The God Who Sees*
4. *El Shaddai: The All-Sufficient One*
5. *Adonai: The Lord*
6. *Jehovah: The Self-Existent One*

7. *Jehovah-jireh: The Lord will provide*
8. *Jehovah-nissi: The Lord my banner*
9. *Jehovah-mekoddishkem: The Lord who sanctifies you*
10. *Jehovah-shalom: The Lord is Peace*
11. *Jehovah-sabaoth: The Lord of Hosts*
12. *Jehovah-raah: The Lord My Shepherd*
13. *Jehovah-tsidkenu: The Lord Our Righteousness*
14. *Jehovah-shammah: The Lord is There*

This list of names of God is an answer for any and every situation that you find yourself in. Look at the first one: *Elohim*. It means he is God my creator. How can that defeat the devil and fear?

Let's say that you are a woman who wants to have a baby but you fear that you are barren. You have gone to the doctor and they have said that there is nothing that they can do. You have an answer to that, "I've got a creator; the same God who made me will also give me a child!"

You fight using the name of God. The scriptures say to call out to God, call on his name. These names have power. Maybe you don't know it, but there is a devil that does.

These names are the attributes of your God and they can be used in any situation be it fear, loneliness, or poverty. He is the Lord who will provide, *Jehovah-jireh*. If you are struggling with sin, he is *Jehovah-mekoddishkem*, the Lord who will sanctify me. In each one of these situations you can cry out to God and literally do what the Bible says, "call on his name".

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About twenty years ago I lived in Cardiff. Behind my house was a set of railway sidings where trains parked when they were either not in use or waiting to go into Cardiff city. That was not all that was there.

Day after day, there would be these people with little books standing there. It didn't matter whether it was raining, snowing, freezing or boiling. These guys would be standing there taking down the numbers of the trains. They were train spotters. I used to think, "Man alive! Aren't they not bored stiff doing that?"

My wife can't see what I see in snooker. I love snooker. I understand it. If you don't understand it, then it's probably boring to you. Boredom is something that affects everybody in some way. In Christian terms it is what we call a *root problem*.

It's a Root, Not A Fruit

Boredom is a root problem for believers. We are all included. Let me explain. There are roots and there are fruits. Some sins, some problems manifest but the manifestation is very different from the root. Boredom is a root. Here are a few examples.

We had worked with people who were addicted to heroin for many years. This is a story that has been repeated a million times over around the world. You take someone in and begin to work with them. Maybe it is a man who is separated from his wife and his children, sleeping in a doorway and injecting heroin every day, facing jail terms and life is a complete disaster for him.

You bring him in and take him through going cold turkey. He is set free. All of the drugs are gone. He goes back home, reunites with his family, gets the court cases sorted and he has his whole future ahead of him.

A few weeks go by and he starts taking drugs again. You go to these people time after time and talk to them. You would ask, "What was it? You had everything together. God gave everything back. What on earth was so powerful that you walked away from all of that?"

Person after person would say, "I was bored. One evening, I was sitting at home and I just felt that I had nothing to do. I got bored."

Boredom, if not recognised, if left unchecked and unmonitored, drives people to sin. I think that this is a common Christian problem and we need to see it. "For lack of knowledge people perish." You can trip over the same thing a thousand times if you don't recognise it.

Boredom gnaws away at you. It eats away at you. It is almost like a form of temptation. Looking at a box of chocolates on the shelf, you say, "I'm not

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going to eat them. I'm not going to eat them," and it gnaws away at you. You see that chocolate, "Oh I'll just have one."

Boredom is the same. My mother used to say that the devil makes work for idle hands. And he does. He doesn't just make work for idle hands but he makes work for idle minds. He will wind you up. The devil makes work for idle Christians.

I don't think that there is any actual limit to this. Listen to the news and so often you will hear stories where boredom was a factor in crime. For example, five young lads are bored sitting at home and they decide to go out for a walk. One of them grabs a knife, just in case, and puts it in his pocket. It makes him feel tough.

They are sitting on a wall and they get bored. Somebody walks by and looks at them funny. It turns into a fight, next thing somebody is dead. The social workers go in and try to get the root cause. But they tend to look at the fruit and not the root.

Turn to Genesis 1:26.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

In other words, God gave man a very important task, purpose and aim. Notice something here. Adam was in the Garden of Eden. God had given him a task in life. He was totally fulfilled, healthy and happy. He was not bored at all. In fact, there was no possibility of that way in him in this pre-sin state. So Adam,

under that covenant and relationship with God, was totally happy and fulfilled.

Look at what happened next. The devil came along and tempted Adam to leave his element. God was Adam's element. A fish's element is the sea. A bird's element is the air.

Your element is God. You were made to be in God. Outside of that element you will have no life. What happened was that the devil conned Adam; a snake came into that Garden and began to deceive Adam that there was greater freedom outside of his element.

Nothing is new under the sun, so it is exactly the same today. The devil still approaches you promising you all kinds of things. But it is a lie and it does not lead to life and freedom but death and bondage.

Let's say that there is a goldfish in a goldfish bowl. Swimming around in its own little world, quite happy and content. But the devil walks up and starts to talk to it. "That's a very small bowl you have to live in. Round and round all the time."

He will begin to talk to it and try and deceive it. "Do you know what you should do? Jump out and be free like I'm free. You don't have to stay in there. Who put you in there?"

And the insinuations of so-called freedom go on and they gnaw away at the fish until it starts to think, "Hey, it is a pretty small bowl. I think I will get out of here." It spins around, building up enough speed and jumps. And plump, he falls to the ground.

The promise that the devil makes is a deception. Does the fish find freedom? The fish finds exactly what Adam found and that was death.

When the Simple Things Aren't Enough

Boredom entered the world when sin entered the world. In that pre-fall state there was no such thing as boredom in Adam's mind. He was utterly fulfilled in God. That is the life that God has promised for you and it is called life in all its fullness; a life of adventure for all of us.

Of course there are certain sacrifices that we must make in order to have that. In your life, God has got to be number one. God must have the number one place in your life and if he does, then you can then enter into that exciting life which is promised.

Look again at Genesis. Turn to Genesis 1:31.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.

You often hear, "He or she said it was good so it must have been good!" Well, if God said that what he made in the Garden of Eden was good, then I reckon that it was extremely good.

But I want to ask the question, what was good? What was it that was good? I want you to see the simplicity of what was good. What was actually good was a *believer alone with God*. There was nothing else. God looked and saw this man and himself and he said, "Now that is very good!"

The trouble with the church is that often that is not what we call good. What do you call good? Does it take fifteen worship bands? What does it take? Does it take a mass crusade before you will say that something is good? Or with the lost? What does the world call good? Is it a rock concert or a bottle of vodka?

What we call good is a very crucial and important point because in the Garden of Eden, what God said was good was man alone with God. The devil had nothing on him. Adam had great joy out of simplicity. He had great peace.

When sin entered Adam, it destroyed his ability to enjoy the simple things of life.

Very quickly Adam got no pleasure from God and the things of God; he could only get pleasure from sin. When sin dominates your life, then you will not want to come to church. You don't want to be around Christians. You don't want to go to a prayer meeting. You don't want to go to cell group. That is because there is something in you and these two worlds are repulsive to each other.

*When sin entered
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simple things of life.*

When sin dominates, you will not want fellowship. You will not want to spend time with your family. You won't enjoy those simple things. Very quickly you take a wrong turn and the only thing that you take pleasure out of is sin. And you will have lost the taste for the kingdom.

It is a very simple point. Because Adam sinned he lost his ability to enjoy the simple things in life. The conclusion is that if you can't enjoy the simple things then you are going to get bored.

This same trap trips up Christian after Christian. We worked with one girl who was on heroin for quite some time. A couple of months after she had had a baby, she sat down to have a cup of tea with us. She looked stressed out. She turned to me and said, "Do you know what? I get no pleasure from this child. It means nothing to me."

All she wanted was heroin. That was one of the most tragic statements that a woman could ever make. But such is the damage of sin that it destroys your ability to enjoy the normal pleasures of life, the good things of this world.

The true measure of your spirituality is not if you need ten worship songs in a massive crusade to say that it is good for you. The true measure is when you

are content; when the garden is enough, you alone with God. The truth is that most Christians lose that simplicity from their lives and it always takes something else.

I'm sorry to use Jeanette as an example all of the time but she is the best example that I've got. She has never lost her love for simple things. She gets great joy in the simple things of life. We were walking down Sauchiehall Street and she went, "Look! There's a plane!"

That kind of simple enjoyment comes from time at home where she can go into the dining room or wherever and close the door. Four or five hours go by and she thinks that she's been in there for one hour. I'd ask her what happened in there and she'd say, "It was good in there, that's what it was".

I would have a look in the dining room and there would be nothing in there! Just a window and a Bible but it was good in there. Simple.

Out of Focus

The first thing that Adam lost was the appreciation for his relationship with God. The second thing he lost, which is equally important, was his focus, Adam lost his job. When Adam sinned, he handed the keys of the world over to Satan. Again, that led to boredom. He was unemployed.

What is your focus? God has made you to concentrate and focus on him. There is no problem with having many tasks in life, we all do. It is just important that at you know that you know God is number one; that he is your key focus at all times. In fact, because man is made to focus on God, you can see how quickly man replaces him with other things if God is not the goal.

Put it like this. Say there were two football teams playing quite happily on a football pitch and I went in there and uprooted the goal post and took them away. What are those teams going to do? They will make their own, using their coats and bags.

That is exactly what people do when God loses the chief place in their lives. They make their own goals. These goals can be money, career, relationship, power, or people. Individuals do the same and indeed churches do the same. They lose their focus on God.

Churches can do the same thing by making a particular ministry their focus instead of God. Jesus always had his Father as number one. The ministry never overtook. Right up to the cross he said, "Father if this cup can't be taken from me, then that's fine because after all I'm only here to do your will."

Even to the very end, he knew exactly what he was doing and why. The book of Ecclesiastes was written all about this point. It was written by the wisest man who ever lived. He warned us not to have any other goal in our lives other than God.

It is very simple but nonetheless very profound. Sin causes Christians to lose their appreciation for the simple things in life. If you lose your appreciation for the simple things in life, then you are going to get bored very quickly.

*Come back to the
simplicity of God.*

Then, it is going to take ever increasing highs to please you. You will end up on the wrong road. You will create goals of every description to fill the void within. Come back to the simplicity of God.

Combating Boredom

Is there an answer? Yes! You are a descendant of Adam. Adam had boredom in him after he had sinned. We are descendents of him so we are born with something already in us. It is almost like a predisposition to dissatisfaction.

It is the job of the church to help us all put God back in first place. How do we do that? We do that by getting our focus back on God; by starting to do your job. I'm going to give you three simple steps that you can do right now to get boredom out of your system.

First, **enthroned Jesus Christ**. Think about yourself and ask, "Is Jesus number one?" In all your decisions and in everything you do, is it truly, WWJD? Is he really number one? A throne only has room for one. Your heart has only got room for one and it needs to be filled with God. That is the first step to take to correct what happened in Genesis.

The second step you can take is to **reinstate the right authority structures** in your life. Start to obey authority and by that I mean God's authority and the authority of men: the church, your pastors, cell leaders and disciplers. They are both important.

Why did Adam fall? It was because he listened to another voice. I could tell you a thousand stories of people whose lives get messed up and so often it was because a snake came along, said something and they accepted it.

Lastly, and probably most importantly, **make sure that you are spirit-filled**. A person who is spirit-filled is fulfilled. A person who is fulfilled is not bored. Make sure that you are spirit-filled and God himself will see you through.

Make Life an Exciting Adventure

About twenty years ago, I was sitting at a train station and met a girl who was in trouble. I was travelling from Dublin to Cardiff and she came over and asked me for money. So I gave her all of the money I had. I had a ticket to get me home.

So I got on the train and said to God, "I hope that was the right thing to do because I've got a long journey to go. I've got a boat to catch. I've got my tickets, but I've got no money now."

There was a night ferry to come followed by another train. I thought, "I'll get off the train in Cardiff and I'll just walk home, but look after me God!"

So I got the train to the ferry, got on the ferry, got off in Holyhead and got the night train. I thought, "Praise God! Nothing's gone wrong. All I've got to do now is stay awake until I get to Cardiff."

I fell asleep and woke up in Newport, seventy miles outside Cardiff at four o'clock in the morning. I got off with my rucksack. The train station was deserted. There was nobody anywhere and I thought, "Oh no! I can't walk seventy miles. I've got no money."

I turned to God, even as a young believer, and I said, "God is there anything in me? What have I done?" I was a bit mad.

"Is there anything? If there is, then I will repent of it now. I willll repent of it but I don't think that there is. Is there? God, the Bible says that if a man regards iniquity in his heart, you won't listen to him so I reject all sin, and I pray God please get me home "

I opened the train station doors and there was a van delivering papers. I walked up to the guy and said, "I need to get to Cardiff."

He said, "I can't take you there but get in and I'll take you to the motorway."

I got into the van and we drove off. We got to the motorway; I climbed out and thanked the man. I put my rucksack on and a police car immediately pulled up. The policeman asked, "What are you doing?"

I said, "I was going to hitchhike to Cardiff."

“That’s against the law. You are not allowed to hitchhike.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know.”

“Get in! I can take you to a roundabout about 10 miles outside Cardiff, that’s the best I can do.”

I got out of the police car on the roundabout, it was now about five in the morning. I looked over and there was my flatmate in his car, parked in a lay-by. He looked at me getting out of the police car and said, “What are you doing?”

I said, “It’s a long story. What are you doing?” He said, “I was taking my mother to Heathrow airport and I didn’t want to sleep in. So I came out for a drive and pulled in here to have a smoke. Jump in, I’ll take you home.”

I was not bored for one minute on that journey. God was with me and I was with God. You were not made for a boring life. But the devil seeks to put something in you that blocks answers to prayer. It is the job of the word of God to make us wise to it.

It is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Let that word shine in you right now. What are the three things that you should do? Enthroned Jesus Christ as the Lord of your heart. Submit to all authority from God and in any church that you are in. And lastly be spirit-filled.

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Turn to 1 John 3:21-22.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

When a Christian has got confidence before God, the Bible says that we can ask of him anything that we want and it will be done for us. That is a huge promise because the heart that knows it's walking right has great confidence. The book of Hebrews says whatever we do, don't throw that confidence away; protect it, guard your heart.

When you are born again and you sin, what happens is that sin causes you to feel self-condemned even after you have confessed and forsaken the sin. God is so faithful to us as we confess and turn back to him, he offers us restored

fellowship with him. But like the prodigal son, we are bothered by our own behaviour.

Many believers struggle with self condemnation which is exactly what John is telling us blocks the power of prayer. You can pray forever and a day and many people do. You can spend an enormous amount of energy in prayer.

However, it is not actually about that. It is about getting the principles right and then making those prayers hit the target so that what we do really counts. That is the backdrop of this study; to bring us all to the place that we can pray and see an answer.

When Satan was coming, Jesus was able to say that his prayers were answered, he had kept a clean temple. That is our goal. We have looked into many things so far that Christians may have in them. If the hat fits wear it. If it doesn't, no problem, learn and help others to be free.

Staying Free

Scripture is full of advice on how to stay free. Number one, you are going to have to learn to **police your own thoughts**. There are some things that God does and there are some things that God is not going to do. One of the things is the renewing of your mind. It is given to you; it is handed over to you.

People say, "I've got this problem with my thinking," and they live in a dream world that one day someone will lay hands on them and everything will be okay. That is not the way it is going to happen. You have responsibilities as a believer and one of them is to guard your own thinking; to police your own thoughts and to take captive anything that doesn't line up with the word of God.

Let me tell you how important this is. I was out praying one day when we lived in Ireland. I was in town and God spoke to me about that subject. That was the word, “You’ve got to police your own mind.”

I was excited because I knew that God had spoken to me. We lived in a sort of *cul de sac*; a dead end where no one ever went and certainly the police never went. I called Jeannette and said, “I just had a word from the Lord about the necessity of policing our thoughts.”

As she was talking to me on the phone, you would never guess what happened. Two cops walked up past the window. She said, “They’re here. There are police outside.”

You may think that it was just a coincidence but I don’t think so. We had never seen police on our street ever before. But at the moment when God spoke to me about policing our minds, police showed up while I was telling Jeanette about it. He wanted us to know that this is serious. We get transformed by the renewing of our minds.

*If you can’t control
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control anything else.*

If you can’t control your thoughts then you are not going to control anything else. If you can’t control your mind and your thinking then your actions, I guarantee, are going to follow on and be completely out of control. It begins with the mind.

In fact, that is Paul’s conclusion in the book of Romans. After he went all the way through the gospel he said, “Do you get it?”

“Therefore,” he said, “you are only going to be changed by the renewing of your mind.” So the first way that we begin to be free is by changing our “stinking thinking”.

The second way is to **police our flesh**. Galatians is very clear about this. The flesh is something that you can't drive out because it's not a demon. Wouldn't it be great if we could? But we can't.

The flesh is something like you are going to have with you all of the days of your life. It is a daily thing. Paul said, "Therefore, I die daily." The crucifixion of the flesh is something that should be a daily occurrence.

So let's look at the flesh right now. All believers have got strengths and weaknesses. The strengths within you have been given to you by God to achieve his goal. The weaknesses within you are often left there by God.

In fact, God leaves many things within us. The weaknesses are left there to draw you to him as a sort of safety catch. The greatest weakness that you have could also be the very thing that keeps you close to God.

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The apostle Paul was a great example of this. He went through his life with what he called, "a thorn in the flesh". He never explained what it was but it followed him all of his life. He said that he cried out to God three times, "please take this from me," but his loving father said no.

God could have delivered him but God cared about Paul infinitely. God knew Paul better than Paul knew Paul. If God took that off from Paul, he would have probably gone wrong in life. God needed to somehow weaken Paul in order to keep him.

Here's a silly example of how I can see that to be so true. We have a clever cat at home and she is a good negotiator, especially when it comes to cat biscuits. She goes out and in our last house, she would not come in at night.

There were dogs and foxes and I wanted to get her in safe. So I devised a strategy to keep her well, I stopped feeding her. I weakened her so she became dependent on me. So I told Jeanette and James our son not to feed the cat.

The cat would be crying, “Feed me! I’m hungry!” I would leave the cat hungry so that when I went out at night and shake those cat biscuits, in she would come. I had to make her weak in order to keep her safe.

God knows you. There are only three reasons why a weakness remains within a Christian. The first one is the thorn in the flesh; that God himself knows that you are struggling in some area but he cares about you through and through and says, “You know what? I’m not going to take that away. It’s your cross and you are going to have to carry it. If I take that then you are going to run from me.”

The other reason is that many people think that they can deal with issues alone but they can’t. We need God for everything. Thirdly, people may have no wish to be free. One of those three reasons is the reason for weaknesses remaining within us. You have got to look at each case within yourself and assess yourself. For the moment, let’s look at Samson.

Turn to Judges 13:1-5.

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, “You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head because the boy is to be a

Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”

What a gracious God! The people of Israel had gone wrong again, gone wayward again and God in his mercy said, “Okay. I will have mercy on you. I will send you a deliverer in the form of Samson.”

And in Samson came but guess what? The deliverer ended up under the same bondages as the people he was sent to deliver. Instead of being in the world but not of it, Samson was in the world and of it completely. It was a sad and tragic situation.

In Samson’s case he was a very strong man. He led Israel for twenty-one years of victory. However, there was one weakness in Samson’s case and that was lust. There was one principal weakness within him and that was women. Turn to Hebrews 12:1, which talks about how believers can have one sin that besets their life.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Take a look at the word sin there. It is the singular word for sin. There are three principal Greek words for sin. There is sin as a principle, there are sins plural, and then there is the singular sin. This is the word used here.

Samson was caught and destroyed by only one thing in his life. He was a man who was strong in so many ways yet one weakness brought him down. The book of Hebrews, to me here, alludes that Samson is not unique.

Hebrews 12:1 is painting an athletic scene here. If I may paraphrase, “Throw off every weight that would entangle you from walking the Christian life, and by the way, deal with that singular sin.”

There is what you might call a point of contention in your life; a point of growth. The problem is when that point of growth becomes the same thing for many years. When that point of growth to you is the same today as it was ten years ago something is up .

Let's briefly take a look at the mistakes that Samson made. First of all, Samson, being a typical man, refused to recognise that he had a weakness. Men die, statistically, younger than women. I think it is about seven years or so. That has been the case for a very long time. There are several reasons why that is the case but one of them is because when men get a bad stomach or a headache they don't go to the doctor. Typically they put it off and try to sort it out for themselves. Samson was just like that. He refused to recognise that he had a weakness so that weakness destroyed him. Don't excuse yourself because everybody has got a weakness of some sort.

The last and biggest mistake that Samson made was that he thought Delilah was just another woman. Read it in Judges. He went and slept with a prostitute in a place called Timnah. Then he travelled another few days and slept with another woman in Gaza.

And then he ended up in Delilah's bed and he said, "What does it matter? It's just another girl. It's just another night." What a mistake he made!

The devil is a subtle foe. He is cunning, clever. He uses deception. Delilah deceived Samson into thinking she was just another woman. But she wasn't; she was the one that would destroy him.

Say you had a drink habit. I used to drink so I understand this well. Which drink is it that is going to give you liver cirrhosis and kill you? Which cigarette is it that is going to push you over the line and kill you?

I had a friend, he was a lovely guy but he happened to be addicted to heroin. He was the most unlikely addict you could ever imagine. He came to us and

we went through cold turkey with him about three times. However he just could not kick that habit.

One day he picked up a bag of heroin, it looked like all the others. He got a syringe; it also looked like all the others. But when he injected that day it killed him.

I think of another man with whom I drank for about ten years. I got saved, came out of that whole environment and tried to bring him with me. But he was very opposed to Christianity and he wouldn't listen. Years went by and I got a phone call one day saying that he was dead. "What?" He was a big strong man.

I spoke to someone who was in the know. "How did he die? What happened?"

He said, "Nothing!"

"What do you mean nothing? He's dead isn't he? What happened to him?"

"Nothing. We were in the pub. He went home with his girlfriend. He lay down and he never woke up."

It was a normal night, a regular pint glass. But he didn't know that that night he was going to die. How subtle the devil is.

*Delilah did not have
a sign around her
neck saying, "I'm
going to kill you!"*

Delilah did not have a sign around her neck saying, "I'm going to kill you!" The heroin syringe wasn't labelled. The anointing left Samson and he didn't know. My point is that if there is a repeated sin in your life, there is a strategy behind it.

The devil numbed Samson to sin. He felt invincible. He felt that he was above the law. That hardening of the heart was all to

get him destroyed and he walked straight into the trap. He should have known better. So any repeated sin in our lives has a strategy behind it and you need to call on God for the grace to either live above it or get delivered from it.

All's Well That Ends Well

As tragic as the story of Samson is, it is a story with a happy ending. I have heard many people speak about Samson over the years but in my opinion, so often people miss the whole point. Samson is a hero in God's eyes. He is in chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews. He's one of the all time heroes of faith.

Samson finished well. One of the shocks of the Bible is that when God looks over history from his perspective, and he makes a list of those he says are heroes of faith. Think of all the characters in Hebrews 11. It is astonishing.

Right in the middle of that list is Samson. Samson? He who destroyed the reputation of Israel? He who defamed God? Samson? It can't be Samson. But of course, Samson is a hero of faith.

Do you see what God honoured in him and wants you to see? It is that man who failed God a thousand times but didn't lose faith in his goodness. Even though he had sullied the reputation of the nation.

But that same Samson when he got that last opportunity, had enough faith within him to say, "My God is still good and he will forgive me. I ask you to give me one last chance to glorify your name." And God poured out his strength again upon him.

Know that whatever is in you, it doesn't matter how long it has been there, the day can come when you finally get it out of you. Look inside yourself. What is your problem? What is it that has been in you all of these years?

Why not take advantage of this moment and say, "God I call upon your grace. I believe you can set me free." Whether God gives you daily grace to walk above it and you will have to carry that cross or whether he sets you free

completely is up to God. The important thing is that you submit. Commit to a holy life. Commit to being a clean vessel.

About the Author

MIKE McKEEVER has been teaching the word of God for nearly 20 years. He has extensive experience in Mission, Church Planting and Evangelism and is widely acknowledged as an anointed Preacher and Teacher of the Word.

Mike's *Preparing The Way* television programme is currently being broadcast throughout Europe, Africa and Australasia. and have been adapted for radio. These radio broadcasts are now on Premiere Christian Radio.

Mike and his wife Jeanette live in Glasgow, Scotland and lead New Mercy Church, a fast growing multi-national, multi-cultural church in Glasgow, Scotland.

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Back to Basics



To contact the author please write to:

Preparing the Way

PO Box 2821

Bearsden

Glasgow G61 2AA.

Scotland, UK.

Or call: 44 (0) 845 527 8442

Internet Address: www.preparingtheway.tv

A wide range of Audio and Video materials in regard to these books and the television programme can be found on the website.

New Mercy Church, 334 St George's Road, Woodside, Glasgow G3 6JR

www.newmercy.org.uk