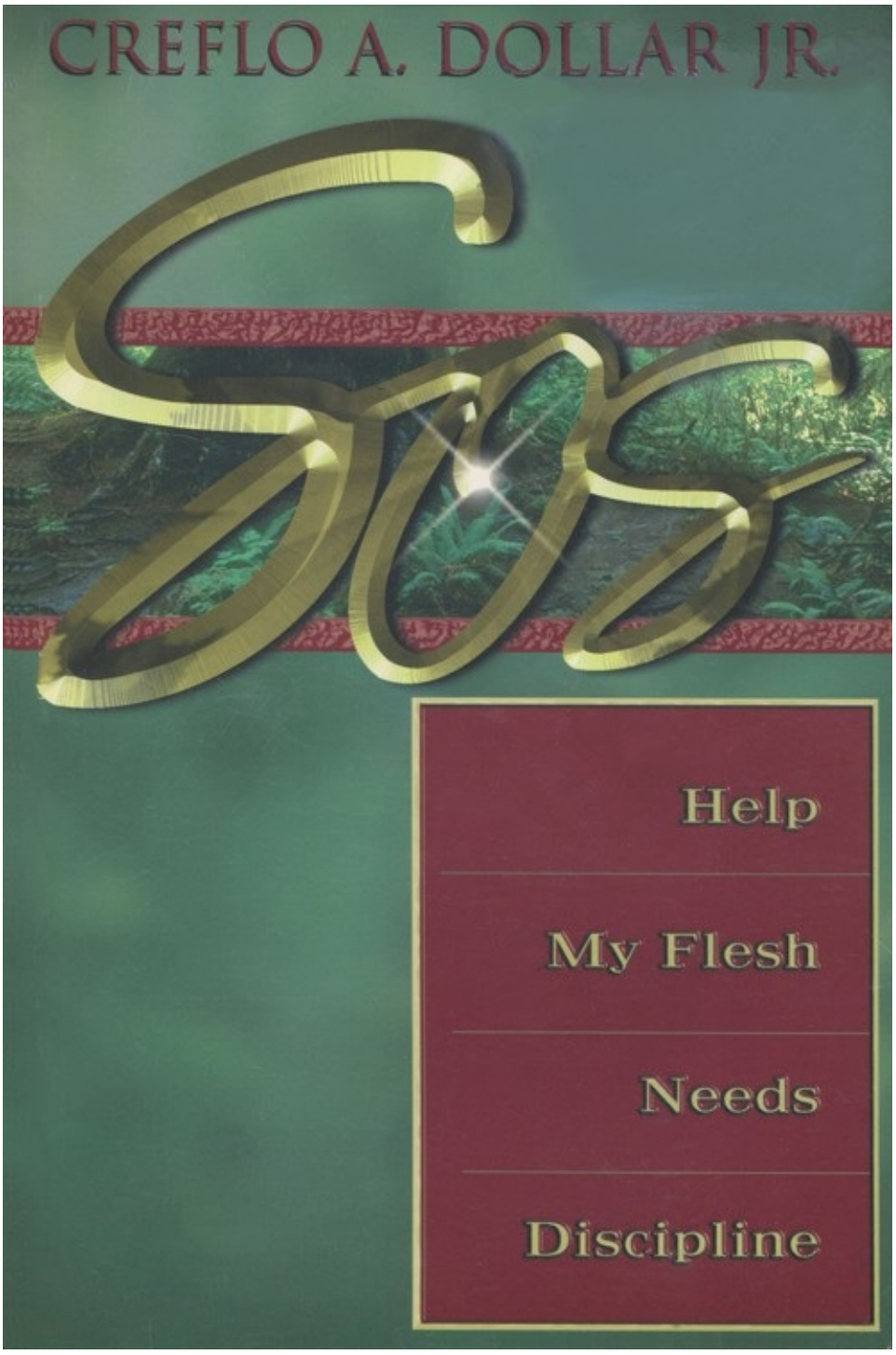
CREFLO A. DOLLAR JR.



Help My Flesh Needs Discipline



SOS! Help My Flesh Needs Discipline

The Anointing of Discipline

by

Dr. Creflo A. Dollar Jr.

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Introduction

Lack of restraint, lasciviousness and the inability to control one's life and behavior, is a tool used by the devil to distract believers and take their focus off the Word of God.

When you sow to the flesh, you put yourself in the position of having to face consequences for your behavior. When you crown your flesh as king, and govern your behavior based on the desires of your flesh, the Bible warns that you will reap the results of this decision. (Galatians 6:8)

You are a spirit, housed in a body and equipped with a soul. As such, God never designed your physical man to be in control. Rather, He intended for you to develop your spirit in line with His Word,

in order to live a godly life rich in blessings.

There's an anointing of discipline for your life that will counteract the solicitation from the world to engage in activities and practices that transgress the Word of God.

If you've allowed your life to get out of control, this book will give you insight and revelation as to why it is necessary for you to modify your behavior.

My prayer is that the information contained in these pages will renew your mind to the way God wants you to live your life. It will take change to prepare yourself for the abundance of His blessings.

The Bible says, *"Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Corinthians 14:40)* Child of God, living a life of decency and order requires you to operate in the anointing of discipline!

Chapter 1

Y

our Expected End

1

How are things going to end up for you? Have you ever wondered about that? The vast majority of the world's population doesn't have any idea how things are going to turn out in their lives. They hope good things will happen to them. They *wish* to live prosperous, healthy lives filled with harmonious relationships. But when it comes right down to it, they don't know what to expect.

That should not, however, be the case for a believer. According to scripture, as a child of God, you can have "an expected end." God said so through the prophet Jeremiah:

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11)

What does the Word of God mean by "expected end?" Two things basically. First, it describes the spiritual principle that you tend to get what you expect. The end result you expect to get is the one you're most likely to receive. That's why the way you think, talk and act has such a powerful influence on

your quality of life. Faith and expectation are closely linked.

Second, your expected end is the outcome God wants you to have. The Word clearly states that God's will is for you to be healed. His desire is for you to walk in abundance and freedom from bondage of any kind.

The good news is, in these last days more believers than ever before are beginning to employ

the biblical principles of faith that make that kind of life possible. Teaching about the Anointed One (Jesus) and His anointing has been proclaimed to the Body of Christ. More of us than ever before are beginning to experience the benefits of the burden-removing, yoke-destroying power of the anointing.

The bad news is, the enemy, Satan, will surely make a desperate attempt to keep as many of us as possible from moving fully into these new realms of power and freedom. The devil knows his time is

short. These are the last days. You can be sure he's planning some type of deception designed to keep believers from seeing their expected end.

Recently, in a time of intercession, the Spirit of God gave me what I believe is a glimpse of that planned deception. I'm convinced that Satan is trying to use the weapon of slothfulness to short-circuit the power of God in your life.

Webster defines slothfulness as "an aversion to work or exertion; laziness; or sluggishness."

Of course, we don't hear the word slothfulness used much any more. Now, the old King James English word has been replaced by more modern words. But the deeper reason is that we're living in a culture in which slothfulness has become so common that most people think it's normal.

If you, as a believer, are going to experience the wonderful fullness of God's expected end for you, you're going to have to go against the tide of this present age and deal with slothfulness. If you're bold enough to do so, you'll experience more blessing and

more accomplishment than you ever dreamed possible.

Crowning the Flesh King

As I began to consider what the Lord had

revealed to me concerning the enemy's weapon of slothfulness in these last days, a picture began to come into my mind. A picture of the contrast between, a new believer and one who has slowly, gradually slipped into the grip of slothfulness.

If you are like most Christians, immediately after being born again, you found that you had an amazing amount of zeal for God. You were in church every time the doors were open. If someone was holding a Bible study, you were there. Once you heard the truth from the Word concerning tithing, that was all you needed. God got His ten percent right off the top, come hell or high water.

A regular quiet time? You better believe it! When that alarm went off an hour earlier than usual, you

jumped out of bed and met God for a personal power-encounter.

Sensitive to the voice of the Spirit? Yes sir! You'd be in the grocery store when suddenly you'd sense a prompting from the Holy Ghost to go and minister to that person down the aisle... and you'd obey—unquestioningly and unhesitatingly.

You'd saturate yourself with the Word of God—listening to teaching tapes as you got ready in the morning, and in your car on the way to and from work.

The fact is, when you are operating at this level of zeal, you involve God in every aspect of your life. You stay connected with God throughout your day. You even pray and use your faith for the smallest and most mundane of life's tasks, such as finding a good parking spot at the mall.

Do you remember such a time in your life? If you're like most Christians, you do. And if you're like many believers, that flame probably isn't burning nearly as bright or hot as it did back then.

Instead of being in church at every opportunity,

you find it easy to miss services, telling yourself you'll get the tape instead (but never do). Without realizing it, you can go weeks at a stretch without ever sitting under the anointing of the ministry of the Spirit.

You also find less and less time for the Word, telling yourself that you're a mature Christian now and therefore don't need as much Word as you did in the beginning. And besides, you already know a lot of the Bible.

Somewhere along the line, tithing falls by the wayside.

When you get your year-end giving report from the church you discover, to your shock and embarrassment, that your giving fell far short of the ten percent the Word of God sets as the minimum standard for qualifying for the blessings of God.

That morning quiet time that used to be so rich

and rewarding? Well, at some point the snooze button became your closest friend and, though you keep meaning to get that quiet time going again, you never seem to manage to do so.

That tenderhearted sensitivity to the Spirit that once made you ready, willing and able to obey the smallest instruction has been replaced by hardness of hearing and hardness of heart. As a result, that person in the grocery aisle the Spirit of God wants to touch, simply becomes someone in your way.

What happened to the fire? What happened to the zeal? Where did the commitment go?

The hard, cold truth is, for most believers, they've become victims of idleness, laziness and slothfulness. In other words, they have crowned their flesh king of their lives.

How does such a thing happen? Well, it doesn't happen overnight. It's gradual and it's primarily the

result of a lack of discipline.

Now, I know for a lot of supposedly spiritual folks, discipline is a dirty word. In a time of trial or trouble, they are quick to say, "Oh yes, God will deliver me. He will do it. Yes, amen!" But the unpleasant reality is, the answer will never come because they lack the personal discipline necessary to operate in God's system. And to see the fullness of God's promises, you must operate in His system. A slothful man simply won't do that. Now, don't get offended. Stay with me and allow me to show you the progression of how a promise of God comes into manifestation in your life, and how slothfulness can short-circuit that progression.

Getting to "Delight"

Have you ever come across a promise in God's Word and gotten excited about it? That surge of excitement is what I call "desire." You are delighted by the thought of realizing that promise. But the true delight comes in seeing that promise become a reality in your life.

Lots of believers get to the desire stage. They see

a promise of healing or abundance in the Word and they want it. But sadly, that's where most people stop. They never move past desire.

Why is that? Because the next stage calls for discipline. And as I stated previously, the attribute of discipline is very rare among Christians today.

You see, it takes discipline to exercise the kind of faith required to bring God's promises into manifestation. But if you have discipline, you'll ultimately see that promise become a reality. That's when you move into the stage called delight.

Desire. Discipline. Delight. That's the sequence you must follow if you want to experience God's highest and best for your life. And what is

discipline's worst enemy? Slothfulness.

What does it mean to be disciplined? One dictionary defines it as "a state of order based upon submission to rules and authority."

I like that definition. We have a spiritual

authority—God and His Word. And God has put certain rules or spiritual principles in place in the universe. To be spiritually disciplined is to put your life in submission to those spiritual principles of faith.

Another definition of discipline is "to train or drill by instruction." This also sheds some light on the subject. In the military, to drill means to repeatedly work on something until it becomes second nature. Does that sound like hard work? It is. But it's absolutely necessary if you want to get to delight. The basic things of God such as prayer, Bible study, sharing your faith, thinking right and talking right must become second nature to you if you want to experience the delight of seeing God's wonderful promises bloom in your life. And something becomes second nature only with consistent, methodical repetition.

Discipline is vital to getting to delight. And that's exactly why so few believers are living delightful lives.

Of course, discipline is rarely fun—at least in the beginning. If you've ever resolved to start getting up an hour early to spend time with God you know what I'm talking about.

If you did manage to drag yourself out of bed the first day, it probably took a lot of work and effort. The same was probably true for the second day and the third day. As a matter of fact, I once read a study that said it takes six weeks of consistent behavior to create a firm habit.

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Y o u r E x p e c t e d E n d

Most people quit long before they reach that point. In other words, slothfulness comes in and moves discipline out of the way.

If you've ever decided to embark on a campaign of serious exercise after a long period of idleness, you can also relate to what I'm saying.

You see a picture of a firm, fit, slim and trim individual in a magazine and say, "Hey, that could be me!" At that point you have desire, but next

comes the discipline part. You go to the gym and hit the machines with great zeal. But the next day you're sore from head to toe. Even your hair hurts. Muscles you didn't even know you had are sore.

At that point, slothfulness is going to do its best to keep you from getting disciplined about your workouts. Either you're going to keep working out each day until it becomes as regular a part of your daily routine as brushing your teeth, or you're going to quit because it's hard.

That is the point that determines whether you experience delight or defeat. And the same is true in spiritual things. Jesus said, *"... If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31, 32)*

According to Jesus, it is only as we continue in His Word that we come to know truth and freedom. He's talking about discipline, and the sworn enemy of discipline is slothfulness.

We've gone around casually quoting John 8:32

for years. *"The truth will make you free,"* brother. But we've taken Jesus' words out of context. He said, *"If you continue in my Word...."* then are we truly His disciples, or His disciplined ones. Then and only then will we know the truth and be free.

I know many drug addicts who know the truth, but they're not free. Why not? Because they've never

continued in the Word. I'm acquainted with people who know the Word better than I do, yet don't do any of it. They experience no delight... no freedom, because they don't continue in that Word.

If, on the other hand, a person pushes through the soreness of the first few days of a new workout program and keeps on hitting the gym with consistency—ultimately what began as an unpleasant chore will become an anticipated delight. Instead of dreading the workouts, he begins to look forward to them. He misses it if he has to skip one. Before long, results will begin to show themselves

in the form of better health, greater energy and increased strength. Through discipline, desire becomes delight.

God never designed your flesh to be in control. He designed a system in which your born-again spirit is in the driver’s seat.

And that born-again spirit—that part of you made alive by the life of God Himself—is supposed to determine the direction of your life.

Still, most believers let their flesh call the shots. The flesh says, “Sleep a little longer. You don’t need to get up and spend time with God. You need your rest.” And so you close your eyes and roll over. "King Flesh" has spoken.

Yes, your flesh will talk to you, won’t it? It will talk to you when it’s raining on Sunday morning and it’s time to get ready for church. It will talk to you when the offering plate passes by. It will talk to you when someone offends you. It will talk to you when sexual temptation presents itself.

Believers who, through neglect or slothfulness

crown their flesh king, never see their visions or God-given dreams come to life. The marvelous promises of God never manifest because they lack

the vital quality of discipline.

To discover how to cultivate that quality, read on.

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Chapter 2

Discipline and the Anointing

2

What does the anointing—the burden-removing, yoke-destroying power of God—have to do with the subject of discipline? Plenty.

When you fail to discipline yourself in the natural, that failure ultimately translates into failure in the spirit.

You can’t hear from God if you lack the discipline to sit still in a church service and listen to the Word.

How are you going to go places in God if you can’t

even make yourself go to church?

You can’t experience the riches of God’s abundance without the discipline to give God His tenth in the form of the tithe.

It’s clear, failure to discipline yourself in one simple, natural area can mean failure in another, more important spiritual area.

I had to face that reality personally. I had to face the fact that if I let my body go, ate whatever I felt like eating, and basically exercised no control over my physical condition, it would ultimately impact me spiritually.

How could I pastor a church with spiritual strength if my flesh was calling the shots in other areas of my life? I couldn’t. If my spirit-man wasn’t in control over natural things like my appetite, it wouldn’t be in control in spiritual matters either.

Discipline. It’s a hard word but it’s a word very much tied to the anointing.

This is a truth that is stated very plainly in the sixth chapter of Galatians.

S O S ! H e l p M y F l e s h N e e d s D i s c i p l i n e

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (Galatians 6:7, 8)

The first thing I want you to notice here is that God said, *"Be not deceived..."* That means this is an area in which it is easy to get into deception.

The next thing that it's important to note is that, *"God is not mocked."* Do you know what that word "mock" really means?

It means "to make a fool of." Child of God, you can't fool God and you certainly can't make a fool of Him.

Then the scripture gets down to the heart of the matter. It says, *"... for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."*

This is a familiar phrase to most of us. We've heard it hundreds of times. But very few of us have

thought much about the implications of the very next sentence. What kind of sowing and reaping is the Word talking about here?

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

What does it mean to sow to your flesh? It means to keep pleasing your flesh. You let your flesh tell you to stay in bed a little longer. Sowing to the Spirit would involve hauling yourself out of bed to spend time with God.

You sow to your flesh when you give your eyes and ears to unclean things on television and in magazines. You sow to the Spirit when you give your eyes and ears to the teaching of the Word.

What does this passage of scripture say we can

expect if we sow to our flesh? A harvest of corruption —in other words—death.

A lot of Christians are blaming the devil for the

corruption, death and decay they are experiencing in their lives, when the reality is—they are simply reaping a harvest of corruption because they've consistently sown to their flesh instead of sowing to the Spirit.

If you let the cravings of your flesh determine what you're going to eat, resulting in a steady diet of grease, sugar, additives and chemicals—then over the course of your lifetime you shouldn't be shocked to hear your doctor give you a bad report.

If you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption.

It's not just true where food is concerned. It's true of every appetite your flesh can create. The sexual appetite, the appetite for leisure and rest, the appetite for comfort, or the appetite for the praises of men.

Let one or more of those appetites rule you and you can be assured, you will reap a harvest and you won't like it. Don't be deceived. God can't be made a fool of, and King Flesh is a cruel tyrant.

Listen to Your Flesh (And Do the

Opposite)

It’s a tragic fact that on countless occasions, a believer who has been praying, pleading and believing for an answer from God has missed that answer because it was preached on a night their flesh told them to stay home from church.

When you feel your flesh resist the idea of getting dressed and going to church, that’s when you ought to jerk the slack out of yourself and get there at all cost.

God probably has something special for you there

and even if He doesn’t, it’s vital that you continually let the flesh know your spirit is in control, by sowing to the Spirit rather than the flesh.

Be Not Weary

When your flesh starts trying to give the orders, do the opposite. Keep it under. That’s exactly what Paul said he did:

But I keep under my body, and bring it into

subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (I Corinthians 9:27)

Paul knew what too few Christians know today. Failure to keep your flesh on a tight leash will ultimately lead to spiritual disaster. Even Paul himself would become a spiritual castaway if he didn't keep his body under subjection.

One reason this is so important is that God cannot direct a man through his flesh. God is a spirit and can only direct you through your spirit. Proverbs 20:27 says, *"The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly."*

As with a candle, your way through life is lit as your born-again spirit communes with, and receives direction from the Spirit of God.

When you give your flesh too much authority, you are cut off from the life-giving, life-saving direction of God.

I don't know how many times I've heard someone

say something like, “Sometimes I just don’t feel like praising the Lord when we’re singing.”

What that person is saying is that King Flesh doesn’t want to praise God, and at that moment the flesh is the dominant part of them. At that moment,

that person has a choice to make. They can sow to their flesh and stand there like a mannequin, or they can sow to the Spirit and praise God whether the flesh feels like it or not!

“But isn’t that being phony or hypocritical?” you may ask. No, it’s called sowing to the Spirit. The born-again spirit inside you wants to praise God, wants to commune with Him, and wants to please Him. It’s just that your flesh is so highly developed and is shouting so loudly, you can’t hear or sense the desire of your spirit.

Look at what Galatians, chapter five has to say on the subject:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall

not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. (Galatians 5:16, 17)

Did you catch that? The Word of God is saying that the desires of your spirit and the desires of your flesh are pulling in opposite directions! Look at that same passage of scripture in a different translation:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Galatians 5:16, 17 NASB)

The first part of this passage contains a wonderful promise. *"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."*

That's just another way of saying what we read in Galatians 6:7, "Sow to the Spirit and you will reap a harvest of zoe life!"

You are sowing to the Spirit when you do those

things your born-again spirit desires, which are the same things the Spirit of God desires. And what does God's Spirit desire? The things that are in the Word, because the Spirit and the Word are in agreement!

We now know that, according to Galatians 6:7, 8, that if we sow to our flesh, we're going to reap death and if we sow to the Spirit we're going to reap zoe life —the God-kind of life.

Now let's look at the very next verse in that passage. It gives us an important key to walking in the anointing of discipline:

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6:9)

Here, the Word of God gives us the condition of reaping that harvest of life. We must "faint not."

What does the word "faint" mean? It means to give up, cave in or quit.

All too often, quitting is the story with many

believers. I've seen the most committed, involved church members quit when weariness sets in. Of course, they never saw their due season of harvest because they fainted.

Their package of blessing ultimately arrives, delivered by God's angelic UPS, (delayed only momentarily by demonic resistance in the spiritual realm) but there is no one there to sign for it.

Their blessing is undeliverable because the recipient fainted before their due season arrived.

No believer can receive God's best in life through giving up, caving in and quitting. And when you start quitting in natural things, you'll eventually start quitting in spiritual things as well.

If you'll quit on your marriage relationship, you'll quit on your God relationship. If you'll be unfaithful to your spouse you'll be unfaithful to Jesus.

D i s c i p l i n e a n d t h e A n o i n t i n g

I've had people tell me, "Pastor, if I become a millionaire I'll give the church everything it needs." I

know they're lying because if they won't tithe on their minimum wage income they won't tithe on a million dollars.

Those unfaithful in the little things will never be faithful in the big ones.

Why do believers quit? According to the scripture we just read, it's because they grow weary. What makes you weary? According to Hebrews, chapter 12, it is weight.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

In the race of God's high calling, many Christians grow weary and quit simply because they're trying to carry too much weight.

Let me ask you a question. What is the weight that is keeping you back? What is it that keeps you in bed when you ought to be praying? What is it that keeps you at home when you ought to be sitting

under the teaching of the Word? What keeps you from tithing and giving?

It is sin, slothfulness and idleness. In other words a lack of discipline.

According to Hebrews 12:1 we are to lay those things aside if we are to successfully run the race that is set before us. And we're not to run the race just any old way we please. We're told to run it with patience.

Now the word patience in this context does not mean "to put up with," in the way we normally use it. When we say "Be patient," we mean sit there and tolerate whatever it is you don't like.

The Bible-kind of patience refers to continuance. I've heard it defined as "consistent constancy." That means consistently feeding on the Word. Consistently confessing the Word and meditating on the Word. It means not being tossed to and fro by emotion or circumstances. Patience is just being

constantly, consistently the same, no matter what the circumstances say or do.

We're told in the first chapter of James that a "double-minded" man, one that is tossed to and fro, should not expect to receive anything from God. Why is that? Because that kind of person won't run the race with patience. They don't have constant consistency.

There is another key to running the race to victory in that passage from Hebrews 12. We find it in the very next verse:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

If you're going to experience the kind of victory that brings you the fullness of God's promises, you're going to do it by looking unto Jesus.

Why do men faint? Perhaps it's because they are looking at the wrong thing. Some have their eyes on

other people. Some have their eyes on the blessings. But the disciplined ones, the ones who make it to their due season, are the ones who are looking unto Jesus.

Why is that so powerful? Because He is the author and finisher of our faith!

If you'll keep your eyes on Jesus, the blessings will come. But if you get too focused on the blessing, you'll grow weary and faint before you ever cross the

finish line.

That's why, in Luke 18:1 we read:

And he [Jesus] spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

In other words, we need to pray instead of giving up, caving in and quitting. It always comes down to a question of discipline!

In the coming chapters we'll explore the relationship between discipline and the anointing,

and how you can cultivate both in order to reap an overflowing harvest of the zoe life of God.

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Chapter 3

Dis

cipleship: A Life of Discipline

3

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, most Christians don't want to hear anything about discipline or getting their flesh under control. We get all excited to hear teaching about prosperity (and thank God for the truth about His will for us to prosper). We love to hear that it's God’s will to heal and deliver us (and praise God it is). We'll stand in line to hear the latest teaching about Bible prophecy and the Lord's return (and yes, I'm so glad He's coming soon).

But when you announce you're going to teach about self-discipline, people don't exactly trample over each other to get a seat.

I realize this teaching involves a little pain and

discomfort, but let me remind you what prompted this book. The Spirit of God made it clear to us in prayer that slothfulness was the deadly weapon of a desperate enemy who wants to keep you from experiencing the fullness of God's burden-removing, yoke-destroying power!

We've also seen that when your flesh is strongest, your spirit is at its weakest. And, conversely, your spirit is strongest when your flesh is fully subordinated to it and under its control.

Did Jesus think discipline was important? You'd better believe it. He used the root of the word discipline to identify those who follow Him and His example. He called them His disciples.

A disciple is literally "a disciplined one." Listen to what Jesus said about following Him:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save

his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

Jesus gave us another indicator of discipleship in the 15th chapter of John. There Jesus tells us that true disciples of His bear fruit:

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (John 15:8)

Why did Jesus say that the bearing of spiritual fruit was the test of true discipleship? Because, as we learn throughout the rest of the New Testament, it takes spiritual discipline to bear fruit. When the Lord began to deal with me on this subject, I had to ask myself some tough questions. Questions such as, "Am I a disciplined person?" In what areas am I disciplined? In what areas do I lack discipline? Why am I undisciplined in those areas? "

Then I turned to the Word of God for answers.

Get Understanding

One of the first things I noticed was that the word disciple not only means disciplined one, it also means "a learner," or "one who receives instruction." That's a very important point. Discipline involves learning what to embrace and what to avoid. It involves getting understanding about God's standards and keys to successful living.

It requires being open to instruction from the Word of God. Are you open to receiving instruction from the Word on getting your flesh under the

control of your spirit? If so, let's begin with an understanding of the source and nature of this battle.

There is nothing more disheartening and defeating than to feel like a prisoner of your flesh. The apostle Paul gave us a picture of this battle between flesh and spirit in the seventh chapter of Romans. Here's just a part of that passage:

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would,

that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. (Romans 7:15, 16)

Does that sound familiar? Can you relate to this scenario?

In modern language Paul is saying, "I don't understand myself. I fail to do the things I want to do, and the things I don't want to do, I end up doing!"

Who among us hasn't felt like that at one time or another. "I want to start eating healthy and exercising," I've heard many times, "but I just seem to keep falling into the same old patterns."

As Jesus told his disciples when they couldn't "tarry one hour" with him in prayer but rather kept falling asleep: "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Let me give you a prime example of this battle to which you can probably relate.

Let's say you start watching one of those infomercials for exercise equipment that you see all

over the airwaves these days. You look at the trim, toned, muscular model and say to yourself, "That could be me. I can do that!"

So, with your motivation high, and your resolve strong, you decide to get a membership to your neighborhood health club. Of course, you have to

look cool, so you go buy a bunch of new workout clothes and a $100 pair of Air-something-or-others so you'll look the part.

You arrive for your first workout, looking good, feeling motivated and ready to sweat. In other words, you have a willing spirit.

You choose a piece of high-tech, state-of-the-art exercise equipment and vow to stay on it until you've burned 400 calories or spent an hour, whichever comes first. You begin.

After what seems like a painful eternity, you look at the clock and only three minutes have gone by. You've burned a total of about 11 calories.

After another three or four minutes of pain, you stop. Your willing spirit has been washed away in a rising tide of weak, screaming flesh.

In that same chapter of Romans, Paul goes into greater detail in describing this struggle between the part of us that desires to please God and the part that wants nothing but to please self:

Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

(Romans 7:17-25)

Paul is describing a war between the flesh—

which he says contains no good thing, and the part of him he calls the inward man—his spirit, which he says delights in the law of God.

Paul was describing himself at a time when the desires of his flesh were consistently dominating the desires of his born-again spirit. Living like that left him thinking, *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me...!"*

But Paul didn't stop there, and praise God he didn't! He didn't leave us and himself in that wretched situation.

In the very next verse he says:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1, 2)

Paul tells us that all we have to do to break this cycle of defeat and condemnation is to walk after the Spirit instead of walking after the flesh.

That's just another way of saying, "Sow to the Spirit instead of sowing to the flesh."

When you walk after the Spirit, you feed your spirit-man until it dominates your flesh. A man or woman who does so won't be wretched and defeated for very long.

All of this goes right back to the heart of what we're talking about—being disciplined and therefore being disciples.

What does it take to be a true disciple? There are five things God is looking for in a disciple. In the following pages you'll discover what they are.

Chapter 4

The Making of a Disciple

4

God is not looking for mere church attendees.

He’s not looking for people who put on a good show. His eyes aren’t roaming to and fro throughout the earth in search of those who talk a good talk. No, He’s looking for disciples—disciplined ones who will walk after the Spirit rather than after the flesh. Being a disciple isn’t easy (if it were, every believer would be one). But the rewards are great. As I look through the Word of God, I see five basic requirements for being a disciple of Jesus. Throughout scripture, true discipled ones exhibit these five traits or characteristics. Cultivate these characteristics and you’ll be reaping the rewards of discipleship.

#1. Bearing the Cross

Are you a follower of Jesus? Before you answer “yes” to that question too quickly, consider the words of Jesus in the 16th chapter of Matthew:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (Matthew 16:24)

Many people have professed a desire to “come

after” Jesus. They say they intend to follow Him, but, as Jesus Himself points out, the price of walking in those footsteps is a high one. Basically, it will cost you everything you have and are.

Look at that verse in the Amplified version:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone

desires to be My disciple, let him deny himself [disregard, lose sight of, and forget himself and his own interests] and take up his cross and follow Me [cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying also]. (Matthew 16:24 AMP)

What the Word is describing here is hard on the flesh! When you start describing discipleship in those terms, you begin losing folks in a hurry. A lot of people will say to themselves, “Hey, that’s not what I signed up for! I like that prosperity business, but nobody said anything about denying yourself and taking up a cross!”

The fact remains, child of God, that in order for you to be disciplined and therefore reap God's greater blessings, you're going to have to let go of your own interests.

If you want to get everything the Bible says you can have, you're going to have to die to self. That's the essence of the term "take up your cross."

You take up your cross when you take up the cause of Jesus. As we saw in the Amplified, it means to cleave steadfastly to Jesus and conform wholly to His example in living. It also means being prepared to die for Him if necessary, just as Jesus laid down His life for us.

The Word is clear, the first requirement for discipleship IS self-denial and cross-bearing.

#2. Renouncing the Enemies of Discipline

We find the second requirement of discipleship in a verse that is frequently misunderstood or confusing to many people. The verse is Luke 14:26:

If any man come to me, and hate not his father,

and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

A lot of people see the word “hate” in that verse and stumble over it. It’s hard to imagine Jesus telling anyone they have to hate their mother, father, children and other relatives in order to be His disciple.

To properly understand this verse you must realize that Jesus was using a figure of speech to make a point. Once again, an examination of that verse in the Amplified Version will shed some light on the meaning of the passage:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his [own] father and mother [in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude toward God] and [likewise] his wife and children and brothers and sisters— [yes] and even his own life also—he cannot be My disciple. (Luke

14:26 AMP)

What Jesus is saying here is that, in order to be a true disciple, your love for God and the things of God must be so strong as to make your love for your family look like hate in comparison.

I call this the principle of renunciation. The second requirement of discipleship is that you renounce anything that cools your primary affection and devotion to Jesus.

In other words, to be a disciplined one, you must renounce anything that is an enemy to your discipline.

I frequently hear family responsibilities being used as an excuse for avoiding the things of God. "Oh, I'd like to pray but, you know, I have children..." I've heard people say.

The hard truth is, if your love for the things of

God is in its proper place, you'll get up before your children do in order to spend time with the Lord.

You'll do whatever is necessary to maintain your spiritual discipline.

It really bothers me when I hear people say things such as, "Well, I really wanted to come to the meeting Pastor, but, you know, my relatives don't believe like we do and I don't want to cause any trouble."

Far too many Christians put the acceptance of their relatives above their devotion to the cause of Jesus. To be a disciplined one, you must renounce the enemies of your discipline. Compared to your love for God, your love for other people and things should look like hate.

#3. Leaving All

As I told you at the beginning of this chapter, being a disciple isn't easy. It isn't for cowards, sluggards or the faint of heart. The third requirement of being a disciple brings that truth home.

In the 14th chapter of Luke, Jesus tells us that there is a certain kind of person who cannot be His

disciple.

What kind of person is that? One who cannot or will not "forsake all."

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

The primary thing Jesus is referring to here is your "stuff." An excessive attachment to material possessions is one of the most frequent barriers to believers becoming true disciples of Jesus.

That's why it's so important that people who have

begun to prosper in God never forget that it really all belongs to God. The Lord gave the children of Israel some similar advice when they were on the eve of possessing the promised land:

And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought

thee forth out of the land of Egypt... And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

(Deuteronomy 8:13-18)

You have to make sure that when God blesses you with stuff, you remember how you got it, and Who gave it to you. If you maintain that perspective, you won't have any trouble when the Lord speaks to you to give some of it away. As far as you're concerned it was never yours to begin with.

The good news is, a person who is prepared to forsake all to follow Jesus won't experience decrease. That person will experience increase.

One day the disciples were sitting around talking about all they had given up to follow Jesus. What was Jesus' response to them? We find it in the tenth chapter of Mark.

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto

you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29, 30)

When God asks you to give something away, you can have increase on your mind because that is how he operates.

But if, on the other hand, you're so attached to your stuff that you're not prepared to forsake all, you'll never experience that kind of increase. Even worse, Jesus said you can't be His disciple.

#4. Continuing Steadfastly

We find the fourth requirement of discipleship in John 8:31. As Jesus points out in this verse, if you want proof of whether or not you're a disciple, check

your level of something called steadfastness.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him,

"... If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed..."

(John 8:31)

According to Strong's Concordance, the Greek word translated "continue" in that verse means, "to stay (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy): to abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, or stand."

In other words, if you remain steadfast in the Word, then you are indeed a disciple (disciplined one). What is the result of being a steadfast disciple? Jesus tells us in the very next verse:

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32)

Do you need to be made free in a certain area of your life? Continuing steadfastly is the key to your breakthrough. You have to be prepared to continue doing the Word.

I've had people come in for counseling for one

problem or another. When I point them to a principle in God's Word they'll say something like, "Oh, I tried that."

Child of God, doing something one or two times

never put anyone over. Just half-heartedly trying out God's principles of faith won't do you any good. It takes constancy, consistency and continuance to know the truth that makes you free. In other words, it takes steadfastness.

That's what *Galatians 6:9* is talking about when it says,

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

It's talking about hard-nosed, hard-headed, bulldog-tenacious, steadfastness. That's what brings your due season into manifestation.

#5. Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit

So far we've seen four clear statements from the lips of Jesus Himself about what it takes to be His

disciple. There is one more.

In *John 15:8* Jesus says:

By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (NASB)

The ultimate test of discipleship is fruit bearing. What kind of fruit? Well, we know from reading the following verses that Jesus is talking about the fruit of the Spirit, the first and foremost of which is love.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. (John 15:9, 10)

Jesus is saying that when you bear love and the other fruits of the Spirit such as joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc., you are proving that you are a disciple of Jesus.

Let me tell you something, if a Christian isn't

walking in love, he can forget about the blessings

that come with being a disciple.

You're probably very familiar with what the apostle Paul said about those who failed to bear the fruit of love:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (I Corinthians 13:1-3)

All the religious words and actions in the world are a waste of time unless you're walking in the fruit of the Spirit.

Taking Inventory

Take the time right now to examine your life for these five evidences of being a disciple. Make sure each one of them is in evidence or in development in your life.

Once again they are:

• Cross Bearing (Self denial.)

• Renunciation (Disowning all things that hinder you.)

• Leaving All (Willingness to give anything, anytime.)

• Steadfastness (Consistency and perseverance.)

• Fruitfulness (Walking in the fruit of the Spirit.)

These are the things Jesus said would characterize those who are His disciplined ones. If you want to overcome slothfulness and reach your

“expected end,” make sure each is in evidence in your life.

Chapter 5

F rom Slothfulness to Diligence

5

Reading this chapter may be hard on your flesh.

In fact, you may get a little bit offended and be tempted to toss this book aside without finishing it. Let me encourage you not to do that. I'm confident that if you will hear what the Spirit of God is trying to communicate to you, it will not only be a blessing to you, it will absolutely change your life for the better.

God has some answers for you here. Answers to questions you've had for years. Don't allow your flesh to cause you to stumble and miss what God has for you.

Thus far in our study we've seen that slothfulness is something Satan is going to try to use to keep you from experiencing God's highest and best in these last days.

We've also seen that God's antidote for slothfulness is discipline.

A good question is, "How can you know if you're being slothful in any area of your life?" Do you have to be a full-blown, do-nothing "couch potato" to be slothful in the eyes of God? Of course not.

It’s possible to be active and diligent in one area of your life and slothful in another. For example, some people are quite disciplined where their eating is concerned and yet have no discipline at all when it comes to spending time with God and in His Word. That’s why it’s important that we shine the light of God’s Word into every corner of our lives in order to zero in on pockets of slothfulness that can keep

us from seeing God’s greater blessing or fulfilling our destinies in Him.

The Way Out of Slothfulness

Once you’ve identified the presence of slothfulness in some area of your life, the next step is to root it out. The good news is, God has provided a way for us to do that. It’s called diligence. Diligence is the way out of slothfulness. I think it’s important that you see that truth in the Word for yourself. To do that we need to fully explore what the Bible has to say about slothfulness and then do the

same thing regarding diligence. It shouldn't surprise us to discover that the book of Proverbs, being a book of wisdom, has a lot so say about slothfulness. One word that Proverbs frequently uses to describe a slothful person is the word "sluggard".

Look at Proverbs chapter six for example:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, *and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. (Proverbs 6:6-8)*

The Hebrew word translated "sluggard" in the book of Proverbs is the word *atsel*. According to the Strong's Dictionary, *atsel* literally means "slothful." We could, therefore, accurately translate the above as, "Go to the ant, you slothful one...".

Why does the Word of God tell us to observe the ant? Because ants possess a certain attribute that a slothful person needs to recognize and imitate. According to the verse we just read, considering the ways of the ant can impart wisdom.

Now, of all the times I've ever noticed ants

around my house, one thing has always been true of their activity—they are always in motion. I don't

believe I've ever seen a bunch of ants being still. They never stop moving. That's consistency. In fact, they are the epitome of being "constantly consistently the same" which is, as we saw back in chapter two, the true definition of patience. They go consistently and methodically at an objective until it's achieved.

There's another truth in the passage of scripture we just read. Verses seven and eight said, *"Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."* The ant does what it needs to do to bear fruit and bring in a harvest without having to be told, begged, supervised, threatened, overseen or prodded in any way.

If only believers were like that. What could the church accomplish if Christians had the diligence

and drive to spend time with God, feed on God's Word, and stand in faith and patience without having to be constantly reminded and cajoled? I'll tell you. With that kind of diligence the Church would be walking in victory, freedom and prosperity. Furthermore, we'd have the gospel preached to the whole world, Jesus would have returned for us, and we'd be enjoying the blessings of Heaven!

Ants are consistently in motion and they don't need someone looking over their shoulders to make them do the things necessary to bring in a harvest. Do you want more insight on overcoming slothfulness? Look at the very next verses in Proverbs, chapter six:

How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and

thy want as an armed man. (Proverbs 6:9-11)

Now, I want you to notice how poverty comes. It comes as the slothful person makes a choice to be idle and lazy rather than diligent and disciplined. The devil didn't make him do it. Circumstances didn't force themselves upon him. He chose, as an act of his will, to rest instead of move.

Every born-again believer must face a hard reality every morning of his or her life. Most of what you experience on any given day is a direct product of your choices—past and present.

If you're living in poverty, don't blame the devil, the system, another group of people or your own "lousy luck." The Word of God is very clear on this matter. Poverty is the result of slothful decisions, end of story.

We find more light on the difference between slothfulness and diligence in Proverbs 13:4:

The soul of the sluggard [slothful person] desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

The idle man is always craving and desiring things but never has anything. “Oh, I wish I had a better car,” the sluggard says, but refuses to do the things necessary to prosper in God.

I’ve heard others say, “If only I had a better job...” knowing full well that they’re not giving their employer an honest day’s work in the job they have. “If only” becomes the constant excuse and complaint of the slothful person. People such as this never do anything but dream and wish. They never get the opportunity to live out those dreams because they’re not willing to do what it takes to cause those things to come to pass.

Not only are the days of the slothful person

unproductive, they’re also just plain hard. Proverbs 15:9 says so:

The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns,
But the path of the upright is a highway. (NASB)

Have you ever tried to make your way through a

field of thick, waist-high briars and thorns? It's hard, slow, painful going. That is precisely what life is like for the slothful man. Making any progress at all is a struggle. Like a man trying to climb through twisted barbed-wire, the sluggard goes from one bad situation to the next.

With the diligent (or "upright" as the previous verse called them) things are different. Life's path is like a highway. It's easier to make progress. Accomplish things. Move forward.

Proverbs has a lot more to say about the hard life and times of the sluggard. For example, we're told that slothful people are easily discouraged by discomfort or adversity. That's the message behind *Proverbs 20:4:*

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

"I'm not going out there to plow!" says the slothful one. "It's too cold!" So, he receives no harvest and goes hungry.

Diligence means being willing to have your flesh

endure a little discomfort for a season. It requires a willingness to stand in the face of adversity without becoming discouraged and quitting.

Along with discomfort and discouragement, there is another tool the enemy can use against a sluggard with great effect. That tool is fear.

The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. (Proverbs 26:13)

In other words, this person is saying, “I can’t go

out and work today, I heard there was lion on the loose. I’m just going to stay in bed!”

Do you see it? When a person has slothful tendencies, fear can be used to keep them from doing those things that will bring them increase and blessing. I see it all the time.

I see people allowing fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of sickness, fear of harm and a host of other fears to keep them from doing the things that position them for promotion and harvest. As a result

they either literally or figuratively “stay in bed.”

That’s exactly what the very next verse in Proverbs talks about:

As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. (Proverbs 26:14)

The next time the alarm goes off and you’re tempted to blow off your quiet time and just roll over for a little more sleep, bring this image to your remembrance. That door, swinging back and forth on its hinges and you rolling over in your bed.

In a very real sense, that swinging door is an open door to the devil. As we’ve seen in all these verses, slothfulness opens you to attack and destruction from the enemy.

Worst of all, once you’re highly developed in slothfulness, you won’t take correction. No one can tell you anything. The biggest know-it-alls in the world are people who won’t do anything. That’s what *Proverbs 26:16* says:

The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer. (NASB)

Your “House” and Your “Field”

In numerous places throughout scripture, our

physical bodies are referred to as tents, temples or houses. (e. g., I Cor. 3:16; I Cor. 6:19; II Cor. 6:16; II Cor. 5:1-4; I Peter 2:5)

I want you to notice what the Word of God says about how slothful living affects your “house.”

By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. (Ecclesiastes 10:18)

Listen to that verse in the New American Standard Bible:

Through indolence [loafing, laziness, sluggishness] the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.

I know far too many Christians whose bodies are broken down, leaky and malfunctioning because they let slothfulness take root in their lives. Decay is the inevitable result of being a sluggish believer.

When you start being lazy about praying, reading the Word and sitting under anointed teaching, consistent decay will result. It grieves me to see believers physically destroyed because of the weapon of slothfulness.

Just as the Bible uses the metaphor of a house to symbolize your body, it also uses the symbol of a field to describe your life:

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (I Corinthians 3:9)

When you are born-again, God plants some things in your life. Like a farmer, He begins working with you to produce some things. That's why there are so many scriptures that talk about bearing fruit. It's also why Jesus compared human hearts to various kinds of soil (Matthew 13)—some which accept and nourish the seed of the Word well and others not so well. What kind of soil you are is up to

What does that have to do with slothfulness? We find out in Proverbs 24:30-32:

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.

When you're slothful, the field of your life is a mess. It becomes "grown over with thorns"—and as we discover in Jesus' parable of the soils in Matthew, chapter 13, thorns represent the cares of this world which choke out the Word in your life.

What else does this proverb tell us about the field of the slothful man? It tells us the stone wall thereof is broken down.

When you allow slothfulness to take root, the ultimate result is that the protecting wall of God's hedge is removed from your life. When that happens, you're fair and open game for the devil.

I've seen it happen over and over. Slowly but

surely, a believer gets slothful in the things of God. His regular quiet time falls by the wayside. He finds more and more reasons to miss church. The fundamental principles of faith such as confession of the Word, guarding the words of his mouth, tithing and giving, and maintaining a positive expectation, all slip into neglect.

Soon such a person has moved outside the sheltering hedge of God's protection. Trouble moves in because the walls are down and that results in increased care, worry and anxiety. As the thorns of care choke out more of the Word, the walls break down even further.

What I'm describing is basically a self-reinforcing

cycle of defeat. A downward spiral that ultimately leaves a Christian devastated and ineffective—all as a direct outgrowth of slothfulness.

Now isn't that exactly what the Lord warned us about at the beginning of this book? Didn't the Spirit

of God tell us in a time of prayer that the enemy would attempt to use the weapon of slothfulness to keep God's people from enjoying the blessings and authority that are theirs in the Anointed One and His anointing?

When you start being lazy about the things of God, a decaying process begins. How do you reverse that process or keep it from ever starting? With the weapon of diligence. Let's turn to the Word to find out what it is and how to use it.

The Solution for Slothfulness

We've seen very clearly and dramatically how the Bible describes slothfulness as a deadly enemy of the believer. But did you know that the Bible never presents a problem without also offering a solution? It's time to turn our attention to that solution for slothfulness—diligence.

First, let's get a New Testament confirmation that diligence is the opposite of slothfulness. We find such a confirmation in Hebrews chapter six:

And we desire that every one of you do show the

same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:11, 12)

In verse 11 the writer of Hebrews expresses his desire that we all *"show the same diligence..."* Then in the next verse he explains by saying, *"That ye be not slothful...."*

Here, just as in the Old Testament verses we've

already examined, diligence is presented as the opposite of and answer to slothfulness.

And did you notice that overcoming slothfulness through diligence is tied directly to attaining the full assurance of hope and to being able to inherit the promises? Once again, God is trying to tell us that slothfulness is the enemy of your ability to experience God's highest and best.

Now we must ask ourselves, what is diligence? What does it mean to operate in diligence? Why is

diligence your assurance that you're going to inherit the promises?

According to one dictionary I read, diligence is defined as "a steady application of effort in any activity." I like that definition. Diligence describes a constant, consistent, steady effort to accomplish a certain thing.

To inherit the promises of God, we're going to have to apply steady effort to study of, and meditation on, the Word of God. We're going to have to apply steady effort to rooting sin out of our lives. We're going to have to apply steady effort to times of fellowship and communion with God.

Diligence in these areas is absolutely essential if you're going to see your expected end manifested. Why? Because as we're about to see, diligence is directly tied to your level of faith. Look at Hebrews 11:6:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently

seek him.

Does this verse say that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him any old way they please? No. Does it say He rewards those who occasionally seek Him? Of course not.

We're clearly told that God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

"Oh, Pastor Dollar, I come to church every chance I get and I'll read my Bible occasionally. Won't God reward me for trying?" Not if you believe the Word of God. Don't expect to be rewarded with the blessings of God if there is no diligence associated with your seeking.

In my years in ministry, I've discovered that, for most people, the reason they fail to receive is not that they don't do the right things. They simply don't do the right things consistently or persistently. There's no steady application of effort. In other words, they lack diligence.

Child of God, diligence will always produce rewards.

For example, take two similar individuals and give them identical exercise and nutrition plans. At the end of one year will both have experienced the same results? Probably not. Why not? Because more than likely, one will have applied those plans with greater diligence than the other.

Who gets the best results? The one with the most diligence.

The same is true where spiritual things are concerned. I've seen people that, when they get around to praying, can pray heaven and earth together. Their only problem is that they never pray with any consistency. Their results suffer because of their lack of diligence.

It is diligence that brings the reward. Not cleverness. Not talent. Not good connections. Nothing but the willingness and discipline to apply steady, consistent effort will bring you to your expected end.

Former President Galvin Coolidge once said it this way:

Nothing can take the place of perseverance. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent. The slogan 'press on' will always solve the problems of the human race.

I know believers who have wonderful ideas. Some have brilliant plans. But those ideas and plans will never become a reality because they simply lack the diligence necessary to bring them to pass. That’s a tragedy. It’s the difference between the mediocre and the millionaire.

Can diligence really make you rich? Read Proverbs 10:4 and decide for yourself:

He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

I want you to notice something about the above verse. The man who became poor wasn't totally inactive. It's not that he was doing nothing. It's that what he did, he did with a slack hand. In other words, his activity was sluggish, inconsistent and undisciplined.

Have you ever known anyone like that?

Everything they do, is done at half-speed. They never throw themselves wholly into anything.

Such a person is an employer's nightmare. They never put in a solid day's work, but on Friday you can be sure they expect a full week's pay. This kind of person can never prosper in the long run. Poverty and lack will always, ultimately come to characterize his or her life. The diligent person, on the other hand, can't help but experience increase. The Word of God promises it.

Another proverb that speaks of diligence as a path to prosperity is Proverbs 13:4:

The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Notice that didn't say the body of the diligent shall be made fat—it said "the soul." That's referring to prosperity and increase. Fatness is a symbol of plenty and abundance.

The diligent person is going to prosper in every aspect of existence. Diligence will bring physical, soulish and spiritual increase.

When you are disciplined to exert consistent, excellent effort, you're going to prosper in your mind. You're going to prosper in your emotions. You're going to prosper in your relationships.

In fact, diligence can get you promoted to the highest levels of enterprise. We see this truth stated in the 22nd chapter of Proverbs:

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean [obscure] men. (Proverbs 22:29)

Not only will the diligent person rub shoulders

with rulers, he or she will be promoted to rulership as well! Take a look:

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute. (Proverbs 12:24)

God is looking for diligent men and women He can trust with responsibility, influence and rule. I can assure you, He's not going to put slothful, undisciplined people over resources and wealth. All throughout the wisdom books of the Bible we see it over and over. Diligence is a major key to seeing the manifestation of all the good things God wants for His children. But it's not in those books only, you'll find it throughout the New Testament as well.

For example, look at II Peter 3:14:

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

When you're looking for something God has

promised, the key is to be diligent.

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Chapter 6

T

he Role of the Will

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Several years ago my wife and I were acquainted with a woman who had been a smoker for years. Her husband and children were constantly pleading with her to quit, but her reply was always the same, “I just can’t. I’ve tried and I can’t.”

A few years later her husband went on to be with the Lord. After a period of time she met and fell in love with a wonderful, man. Before long, she found herself hoping with all her heart that this gentlemen would propose.

One day he mentioned the fact that he could not marry a woman who smoked. Would you like to guess how long it took that woman to quit smoking? Not a month. Not a week. Not even a day.

She quit smoking in an instant. She made a

quality decision as an act of her will. Once she exercised that God-given part of the soulish realm called the will, she became an instantaneous non-smoker.

The human will is a powerful thing. Even Jesus had to deal with it. We see Him putting His will in subjection to the will of the Father in the 22nd chapter of Luke:

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:41-44)

It’s easy to forget that Jesus was God in human flesh. His flesh was subject to the same temptations

as yours or mine.

There in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' flesh took a look at what was ahead—rejection, mocking, beating, spitting, a crown of thorns, the whip, the nails, the weight of all the sin of the world—and said, *"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me."* But aren't you glad He followed up by saying, *"nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done?"* Jesus exercised His will by choosing to go with the will of the Father.

There was no devil in hell that could have taken Jesus' life against His will. He had to willingly lay it down if He was to become the sacrificial payment for our sins. That's exactly what He said He was doing in the tenth chapter of John:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17, 18)

At any time Jesus could have called legions of angels to come to His aid. Because he was fully man, Jesus had to exercise His will in order to carry out God's plan. The same is true for you and me.

We have to renew our minds to this reality. We have to recondition our thinking away from the mindset that says, "I'm a powerless victim of my circumstances."

You must eliminate the mindset that says things such as:

"I can't quit smoking. I'm addicted."

"I can't eat right."

"I can't control my temper."

"I can't get up early and spend time with God."

Real change begins with renewing your mind to this biblical truth: You began these bad habits as an exercise of your will, and you can stop them the same way.

"But Pastor Dollar," I can hear you saying, "I've

done that. I've used my will to try to change something about my life, and it didn't work!"

I do realize it is likely that at one point in your life you made a decision with all your heart to change, and fell flat on your face. We all have.

What you must realize is that when you make a choice to do things God's way, a war is initiated. The devil is not going to move out of some area of your life without putting up a fight.

The moment you've set your will to break an addiction, you've started a war. The moment you make a quality decision to bring discipline to some area of your life, you've started a war.

"Well then, aren't I better off not even trying?" you may be thinking. Absolutely not. As we've seen, as long as the devil has a stronghold of slothfulness in any area of your life, it can keep you from experiencing the blessing and increase of God. If you want to see your expected end, you're going to have to become diligent.

And there's no way to do that without picking a

fight with the devil.

You see, a lot of Christians just want to be able to stand in a prayer line, have someone lay hands on them, and "ZAP!" No more problem. Instant discipline.

It rarely works that way, however. God will

occasionally do a remarkable work of deliverance in someone's life, but that's the *rare* exception, not the rule.

The War Against Your Soul

Yes, if you're going to move from slothfulness to diligence, you're going to have to fight a war. It's not optional.

The apostle Peter makes mention of this war in I Peter 2:11:

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul....

Now, when most people see the word "lust" they

immediately think in terms of sexual desire. That certainly is one type of potential lust, but it's far from being the only one.

The word lust merely means "strong appetite." There are many different things that a person can lust after. Some lust after money, power or influence. Others lust for food, comfort or leisure. An excessive appetite for anything can become lust. And what did Peter say about these fleshly lusts? They war against your soul.

Out-of-control appetites do more than just bring war to your mind and will. They also try to draw you away:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:13-15)

T h e R o l e o f t h e W i l l

Lust will draw you. It will draw you away from the things of God and toward those things that ultimately result in death.

As in any war, the price of losing this battle is high. As James points out, it can cost you your life.

Winning the War

As we've seen, there is a direct conflict between your will (once you've chosen to be diligent) and the lusts and desires of your flesh.

What decides which side wins? What determines whether you move into diligence or stay in slothfulness? The answer is simple.

As in any war, the side that is strongest wins.

And which side is stronger—your fleshly desire or your will—is determined by which one is the most well nourished.

You see, each day of your life you do things that either feed your flesh or feed your spirit. A desire for something grows stronger only as you give attention to it.

You don’t suddenly catch a strongly developed sexual lust like you might catch the flu. It begins as you give your attention to something like pornography or even risque television shows. The more you give attention to that kind of thing, the stronger desire grows. The more you feed it, the bigger, stronger and more deeply entrenched it gets. This trap is even more deadly because, while you’re feeding fleshly desire, you’re almost certainly neglecting to feed your spirit. If you’re consuming pornography, you’re not going to be spending time with God or feeding on His Word.

It’s no wonder that, when you finally try to use your will to change your behavior, you fail. You have a strong, highly developed desire and a puny,

undernourished spirit.

So how do you reverse that state of affairs? First, you must cut off nourishment to the ungodly desire. You must quit feeding it.

Then you must do the things that bring the power of God onto the scene. That means using your faith. In fact, anything we accomplish as believers we must do by faith.

Believing God to break an addiction is no different than believing God for a new bicycle. You must find some Word to stand on. Meditate on that Word. Speak that Word out and keep your mouth from saying anything contrary to that Word. And finally, you must put corresponding action to your faith.

James 2:20 tells us that faith without corresponding action is dead. That's why it is so important to begin this process by cutting off the flow of nourishment to the desire you're trying to break.

If diligence is ever going to replace slothfulness in your life, your spirit and its desires are going to have to be stronger than the cravings of your flesh.

A Disciplined Mind

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Thus far in our study, we've been exploring the need to get control of the flesh and what it takes to do so. But the fact is, if you're going to discipline your flesh to pray, to eat right, or to abstain from destructive and addictive things, you're going to have to address your thought life.

You see, thoughts are not harmless, innocent, meaningless flashes in the circuitry of your brain. According to the Word of God, thoughts have consequences. Thoughts have power. Thoughts grow into actions and actions into habits.

Before we get more deeply into understanding the power of disciplining your thoughts, I want you to take a look at an important passage of scripture:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set

before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

The first thing we learn from this passage is that, if we're going to make it all the way to the end of the race, we're going to have to lay some things aside. What must you lay aside? According to the above verse, weights and sin.

You can't successfully run the race of life while carrying around heavy weights such as negative habits, undisciplined flesh and outright sin. As I've been saying all throughout this book, if you're going to experience all God has for you, you're going to have to become disciplined. And that means losing the dead weight.

Now, notice that in verse three the writer of Hebrews says, *"consider Him [Jesus] that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."*

God's Word instructs us to do something here. We're told to consider Jesus. Where do you do your considering? In your mind.

Now we're not being told to consider Jesus simply to give us something to do. The Word says do it because there is a benefit in it. What is the benefit? Not getting weary in your mind and fainting.

In the long history of the Olympic games, no one ever won a race who fainted on the third lap. You can't win if you faint. And, according to this verse, you're in danger of fainting if you are mentally weary.

As we've seen previously, the mind is part of the soulish realm of a person's existence. The mind, will and emotions comprise the soul. Then there are the other two realms—the spirit and the body.

You are a spirit. You have a soul. And, you live in

a body.

What this scripture is telling us is that if you don't consider the Word (Jesus is the Word made flesh, according to John, chapter one), you'll get weary and faint in your mind.

It's important to understand that the mind is the arena of faith. It's the battleground upon which you'll either win or lose the fight of faith. In fact, it's

difficult to overstate how important your thought life is where the things of faith are concerned.

This is true for many reasons. One important one is that your mind is where belief takes place.

Space does not permit it here, but I challenge you to do a word study on the words "believe" and "belief" sometime. It's a real eye-opener. Here are just a couple of examples:

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his

heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:23, 24)

What you receive in life is directly tied to what you believe. In fact, your very salvation is a product of belief:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (Romans 10:9-11)

And just as a belief in the truth will bring you salvation and blessing, belief in the lies of the enemy and the lies of this world's system will bring you curses and death:

And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (II Thessalonians 2:11, 12)

Belief is a product of your thought life. Whether you believe the truth or believe a lie is determined by how successfully you fight in the battleground of your mind.

The first step in winning this fight is acknowledging it exists. You must face the fact that Satan is after your mind. He wants to sit in the cockpit of your mind and have you cooperate with him in controlling your actions and behaviors.

The direction the pilot (your mind) sets, is the direction the plane (your body and actions) is going to go. And either the Spirit of Truth is in the cockpit of your mind with you, or the enemy and his lies.

Look at what Jesus said about the role of the

Holy Spirit in this regard:

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13 NASB)

The course of your life and the nature of your actions are going to be governed by your thoughts. That's why the enemy will work hard to gain access to that area.

It's vital that we learn how Satan operates against us so we can defeat him. What is his primary plan of attack? To deceive you. To get you into deception. To get you to start thinking the way the world thinks. That's why Paul says:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8 NASB)

Deception is nothing more than wrong belief. It is

a belief in something that is false. But what makes deception so dangerous is that, at the heart of every lie is a little kernel of truth.

Back in the Garden of Eden, the serpent told Eve what God had said. Only, he left out a little and added a little. There was a core of truth in what the serpent said to Eve. It was just twisted a little.

Eve fell into that deception and sin entered the world. Deception will keep you from fulfilling your destiny.

Are you beginning to see how important it is to discipline the mind? It's actually the key to disciplining your flesh, isn't it? Romans 12:2 just comes right out and says so!

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind....

(Romans 12:2)

According to this verse, changing your patterns of thinking to bring them into alignment with the truth

of God’s Word will actually transform you.

Once again we see why deception and wrong thinking is so dangerous. It too can transform you... negatively.

If you’re looking at yourself today and don’t like what you see, you need to face the fact that who you are is a direct product of how you’ve been thinking, and what you’ve been believing. The Word of God says so.

Satan’s Messengers

When it comes to waging war in the battleground of the mind, it’s important to know who you’re fighting. In actuality, you’re not just fighting your own carnal nature. You also have to contend with spirit-beings who try to operate in your soulish realm—in particular the realm of your mind.

These demonic forces don’t have much power or authority. They rely upon you giving them access to your thought life. It’s really all they have the ability

to do. That's why their most frequently used weapon is the weapon of suggestion.

Demonic spirits will try to suggest things to you in order to introduce deception and false ways of thinking into your thought life.

Don't get the Hollywood idea that you need to worry about demons creeping around in your attic. If they're around, they're trying to creep into your thought life.

One of the most familiar passages of scripture that describes this battleground is II Corinthians, chapter 10:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.... (II Corinthians 10:3-5)

Here the Word clearly tells us that, although it

may seem like the battleground is your flesh, it's really in your mind. You only see the results in your flesh.

How is this battle fought? By *"casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."*

Imaginations and thoughts that are contrary to the Word and will of God are the seeds which, if left to grow, will ultimately become strongholds of behavior and action.

Because of the nature of this battleground, it is

vital that you learn to do what the Bible calls walking in the Spirit. This was Paul's instruction to the Galatians:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

Notice the result of walking "in the Spirit." You won't fulfill the lust of the flesh. Here we have a key

to getting your flesh under control! As we saw in a previous chapter, Paul went on to elaborate on the battle between the desires of the born-again spirit and the desires of your carnal flesh:

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. (Galatians 5:17, 18)

To get your flesh under submission, you're going to have to learn to walk in the Spirit.

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? It just means walking according to the Word. Jesus said *"the words that I speak are spirit and they are life."* (John 6:63)

When you walk in the Spirit, it means you've been feeding and nourishing your spirit by meditating on God's Word and spending time communing with Him. It means that you hear the voice of the Spirit louder and more clearly than you hear the voice of your flesh or the voices of demonic

suggestions.

It also means that when you hear that voice of the Spirit, you act on it.

Now let me tell you what walking in the Spirit is not. Walking in the Spirit is not walking in presumption. It's not walking in religious foolishness. It's not walking around like some deep, mystical, Christian guru.

I've met people who tend to over-spiritualize everything and think they're walking in the Spirit. The true Spirit-walk is a practical walk. It's a real walk.

Of course, before you can let your Spirit-walk keep you from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, it helps to have a realistic assessment of what your flesh is capable of. That's what Paul gives us in the next few verses of Galatians in the passage we have been examining:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which

are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

I want you to notice something here. Verse 19 did not call all these horrible things works of the devil. No, Paul called them works of the flesh.

Isn't that interesting? We shouldn't blame the devil for the wickedness in our lives. According to the Word of God, it's a product of our flesh when it's given it's own way.

We must take responsibility for the darkness in our lives.

The role the devil plays is getting us to think wrong. Deception leaves your flesh free to produce works like those listed above.

In the middle of that list is a word we don't hear

very often these days. It’s a word few Christians understand. In the next chapter we’re going to examine the meaning of this important word. That word is lasciviousness.

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Chapter 8

La

sciviousness

8

The dictionary defines *lasciviousness* as “a tendency to be unrestrained.”

It’s talking about a way of living in which there is little or no control over the appetites of the flesh. If you eat whatever you feel like eating and eat as much of it as you want, you’re lascivious in that area.

If you don’t climb out of bed until you’re good and ready, you’re lascivious where sleep is concerned.

If you gratify your sexual cravings any way you please, that too is lasciviousness. In fact, it’s

possible to be lascivious in almost any area in which your flesh has an appetite or a need.

Now, in the previous chapter we saw that lasciviousness was listed among the works of the flesh in Galatians chapter five, right along with fornication, witchcraft and murder.

Make no mistake about it. Having unrestrained flesh is serious business in the eyes of God. Why? Because it will keep you from fulfilling His plan and destiny for your life. The inability to control your eating will derail your calling just as surely as adultery will. Both are equally destructive to you realizing your expected end.

If I seem to be talking a lot about food and eating in this book, it's for a good reason. I'm convinced that lasciviousness regarding food is the cause of more spiritual shipwreck and human failure than almost any other appetite.

It's no accident that the serpent's temptation of

Eve in the Garden centered on food. (*“Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”*)

You’ll also remember that Satan’s first temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was food-related. (*“If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”*)

Obviously the enemy knows something here. If food was the initial point of attack against the First Adam and the Last Adam—Jesus, then perhaps we ought to make sure we’re not being tripped up in this area as well.

I’m also using the unrestrained desire for food as a frequent illustration because it is something I’ve had personal experience with.

There was a time in my ministry in which it became apparent that, if I didn’t get control in this area of my life, I would never accomplish all the Lord had called me to do.

I’ve always enjoyed food. For example, I used to become irritated with my wife. We’d buy a big bag of oatmeal-raisin cookies. She’d reach in and pinch off

a little part of a cookie and put the rest away. Me? I'd have the whole bag eaten in no time.

She was exercising restraint. I was demonstrating lasciviousness.

The Lord spoke to me one day and said, "If the devil can whip you over food he can whip you over anything." I knew that if I was ever going to see God work in great power through me—if I was ever going to see the dead raised in my ministry—I was going to have to get control of my flesh where eating was concerned.

That's why the principles I'm outlining in this book aren't just abstract theories to me. I've lived them. Yes, I know they work because they're in the

Word. But I'm also writing as a witness to you that I've applied them and they worked for me.

This isn't theology for me. It's life.

Likewise, there are some things you are uniquely called to do. Satan knows it and he's going to do his

best to keep you from fulfilling that high calling. The most effective way for him to do that is to get you into lasciviousness in some area of your life.

The Mind and Lasciviousness

In the previous chapter we saw that the mind was the battleground that determined what you did in the flesh.

As you would expect, this is true where lasciviousness is concerned as well. How does your thought life result in lasciviousness? The Word clearly shows us in the fourth chapter of Ephesians:

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ.... (Ephesians 4:17-20)

This passage of scripture shows us a progression.

It began with a vain mind and a darkened understanding. It ended with them giving themselves over to lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness.

I want you to pay close attention to the wording of that last verse. Notice it said these people had *"given themselves over"* to lasciviousness.

Lasciviousness doesn't just jump on you and take control of your body. It progressively and

gradually becomes the norm in your life as you give yourself over to it. In other words, it is a result of your choices.

You don't just wake up one morning, after years of being disciplined, and suddenly abandon all restraint in some area of your life.

Inch by inch, step by step, you remove restraint until one day you find yourself in full-blown lasciviousness with your flesh calling the shots.

It's like the old story of the frog in the kettle.

It’s a scientific fact that, if you put a frog in a pan of hot water, he’ll jump out because he’s uncomfortable. But if you put that frog in a kettle of cool water and then gradually turn up the heat under it, the frog will eventually boil to death without ever jumping out.

The frog gets accustomed to each rise in temperature and doesn’t realize he’s in a deadly situation until it’s too late.

The same is true for many believers where restraints on their flesh is concerned. They gradually cast off restraint a little at a time. They don’t realize how dominant their flesh has become until the deadly force of lasciviousness is threatening to destroy them spiritually and physically.

It begins as a tiny seed but, unless uprooted, will ultimately become a massive tree.

The seed of lasciviousness is a thought. It’s end result is an unrestrained life headed for destruction.

There are basically three areas in which lasciviousness can be present in your life. There is:

• Lasciviousness of the mind. (Thoughts)

• Lasciviousness of the mouth. (Words)

• Lasciviousness of the body. (Actions)

These three realms also represent a progression or sequence. Unrestrained thinking will ultimately lead to unrestrained talking. Unrestrained talking will always result in unrestrained behavior.

To get all the way with God, you're going to have to overcome lasciviousness. Are you ready to do that? Before you continue this study, say this confession aloud as a declaration of faith:

• I refuse to live a lascivious life.

• I will not allow my thought life to be unrestrained.

• I take every thought captive to the obedience of the Anointed One and His Anointing.

• I walk in the Spirit and therefore do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

• I am spiritual, therefore I think the Word,

speak the Word and do the Word.

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Chapter 9

P

ulling Down Strongholds

9

Have you ever had dandelion weeds in your yard? If so, you know they're not easy to get rid of. If you simply cut one off at ground level, it will grow right back bigger and stronger than before.

No, to get rid of a dandelion, you have to pull it out by the roots.

The kinds of slothful and undisciplined behavior we've been talking about are like those dandelion weeds. Many people will try to get rid of them by working above the surface.

They'll buy self-help books from the secular bookstore. They'll get counseling and therapy and psychological help. They'll get prescriptions from their doctor. They'll make New Year's resolutions and turn over a thousand new leaves.

All of these efforts at change are like cutting that dandelion off at ground level. They're external. It may seem to do some good for a time, but before long the problem comes back worse than ever.

If you want to experience true change, you're going to have to go after the root of slothful and lascivious patterns of action. The good news is, God's Word tells us how to do it.

Let's start by revisiting II Corinthians, the 10th chapter:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the

knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.... (II Corinthians 10:3-5)

The first thing I want you to observe about this

passage is the nature of and location of the battle.

We're told that though we walk in a fleshly body, this battle is not a flesh battle.

This is where most people make their first mistake. They think that if their flesh is out of control, the problem must be in their flesh. As a result, they attack the problem with carnal or natural weapons.

What kind of weapons should we use? Verse four tells us:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; (II Corinthians 10:4)

The weapons that will win your war against addictions and negative behaviors are not carnal (fleshly and natural) ones. They are mighty through God.

Think about it. What type of spiritual weapon has God placed in the hand of every believer? The sword of the Spirit—the anointed Word of God. To win this fight, you're going to have to be heavily armed with

God's Word. You're going to have to know it, meditate on it, speak it and do it.

What is this weapon good for, according to verse four? The pulling down of strongholds.

A stronghold is nothing more than a demonically inspired and instigated pattern of thinking. A pattern that is deeply entrenched. In fact, it's just what it's name suggests—a strong hold on your thinking by demonic powers.

The battleground is your mind and the only

effective weapon is the Word.

Not only does this passage of scripture give us the weapon, it also gives us the strategy. Aren't you glad it does? In a war, it's not enough to have the most powerful weapon, you also have to have the proper tactics and strategy if you want to completely defeat your enemy.

We find the winning strategy in verse five:

Casting down imaginations, and every high

thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.... (II Corinthians 10:5)

Here we have another confirmation that the battleground is your mind. The key words in this verse are imaginations, knowledge and thought. All three of these things are in the realm of your mind, aren't they?

This verse also shows us why the Word of God is such a powerful weapon against these strongholds. You can't know whether or not something is exalting itself against the knowledge of God unless you have knowledge of God from His Word.

You can't bring thoughts into captivity to the obedience of the Anointed One and His Anointing, unless you know what to obey.

In this powerful passage we are given three important keys. We are shown:

• The battleground. (The mind.)

• The weapon. (The Word.)

• The strategy. (Casting down imaginations and

taking thoughts captive.)

Now let's take a closer look at the demonic powers behind these strongholds.

Cleaning Your "House"

In a previous chapter we saw that the house is used in the Bible as a metaphor for the physical human body. In the 12th chapter of Matthew, Jesus used this symbol to teach us some things about how demonic powers relate to human vessels:

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation. (Matthew 12:43-45)

There are several insights into demonic activity we can glean from this passage.

First, notice that Jesus said, *"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man..."* This tells us that some spirits are unclean. There are spiritual beings, called demons that are vile, filthy and perverse. It also tells us that they can inhabit a human body, otherwise they couldn't go out of a man.

The second thing I want you to notice is that these spirits seek a place to rest. They need a place to dwell. When Jesus cast a legion of demons out of the madman of Gadara, (Matthew 8:31) they begged to be sent into a herd of pigs.

Demonic spirits seek a dwelling place to rest.

Now, before I go any further, I want to clarify something. There is a lot of bad theology and strange thinking in the church where demons are concerned. People these days tend to be in one of two ditches. Some people don't believe demons are real. They think the Bible only talks about them because people back in those days didn't have the medical

knowledge we do today.

Other people see a demon under every rock and behind every tree. They think every symptom, every craving, every tendency and every twitch is a devil. Some sincere Christians actually are terrified that they'll become demonically possessed.

The truth of the Bible actually lies between those two extremes.

Demons are real. Jesus Himself says so on several occasions in scripture. The Bible teaches that they are fallen angels who joined Lucifer in his rebellion against God and were cast out of Heaven.

A demon can possess an unbeliever, but a demon cannot dwell in a genuinely born-again Christian spirit. Let me repeat that for emphasis. A demon cannot dwell in a Christian's spirit.

How do I know that? Because the Bible teaches that when you are born again, Jesus comes to live in your spirit. Colossians 1:27 says, *"Christ in you, the*

hope of glory."

If you're saved, Jesus is on the inside of you and, I can assure you, He's not about to share a house with the devil!

The final thing I want you to see from the parable Jesus told about the house is that when the demons were driven out, it was cleaned up but left empty:

Then [the demon] says, "I will return to my house from which I came; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order."

(Matthew 12:44 NASB)

A lot of unbelievers manage to clean up the house of their lives for a time, but unless they fill it with Jesus, their solution is only a temporary one. Eventually they'll be seven times worse off than when they started.

If you're reading this and you've never made Jesus Lord of your life, there will never be a better time than right now to get that taken care of. You

can fill the house of your life with Jesus by inviting Him into your heart and surrendering control of your future to Him.

You don't want to do a temporary clean up of your house then leave your spirit empty. Peter had this in mind when he wrote:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. (II Peter 2:20, 21)

Binding the "Strong Man"

The parable of the cleaned-up house wasn't the only illustration Jesus used to explain how the enemy sets up housekeeping in someone's life. We find another instance in the 11th chapter of Luke. The Pharisees had just accused Jesus of casting

out demons by the power of Beelzebub—the captain of the demons. Jesus responded by saying:

... Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. (Luke

11:17-20)

Once Jesus had answered the Pharisees' accusation, He went on to use the opportunity to do some teaching about how Satan sets up housekeeping in a person's life, and how the power of the Anointed One sets him free:

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when one stronger than

he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. (Luke 11:21, 22)

Here is what I want you to see. When a stronghold (the strong man) is deeply entrenched in a person's thinking, natural means are not going to move him out of there.

But when someone stronger—Jesus, the incarnate Word of God—shows up, that stronghold is broken, overpowered and kicked out.

Here is how that works for us today. The armor that protects a demonic stronghold is your ungodly patterns of thinking and unholy attitudes. An unbiblical thought life represents the walls of the stronghold.

Now remember, Jesus and the Word are the same. Jesus was the Word made flesh. So, when you begin to replace unbiblical thoughts with thoughts from the Word, you are bringing the one stronger into your house to bind the strong man.

When you begin to take thoughts captive to the

obedience of the Anointed One and His Anointing, it's like bringing Jesus Himself into your mind to overpower the enemy and plunder his goods.

The continued presence of a stronghold in your life is dependent upon you continuing to have thoughts, opinions and attitudes that are not in alignment with God's Word. As soon as you begin to

bring them into alignment, that stronghold is under heavy attack.

The more areas you bring into alignment with God's truth, the fewer strongholds you will have in your thinking.

It would be nice if the moment we were born again, all our thinking and attitudes automatically switched over to truth. But it doesn't work that way. Yes, your spirit is instantly reborn, but your mind must be renewed bit by bit. That's why Paul said:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12. 2)

No, getting born again is not the conclusion of the process. It is only the beginning. Once you're saved, you must go to work replacing all your old ways of thinking with God's ideas, attitudes and viewpoints.

It is only then that strongholds will be pulled down and you'll see lasting changes in your outward behavior.

Adults spend 30, 40, 50 years and longer having their ideas shaped by the world. They let parents, friends, TV, Hollywood and every tool of the devil tell them how to think. Then they expect to change all of that in one revival service.

It simply doesn't work that way. That's why we must go back to that characteristic we talked about in a previous chapter called persistence. You must be willing to stick with it until it's done.

Will you encounter resistance as you begin this

process?

You'd better believe it. The devil will let you do

anything before he'll sit by and watch you get into the Word and prayer.

Make a quality decision to start getting into the Bible on a regular basis and get ready to have some warfare in your mind and in your body. You'll get sleepy, hungry, distracted, tired and a dozen other things right about the time you sit down with your Bible.

Satan knows that if you get the Word firmly planted in yourself, he's a goner. He will no longer be able to have his way in your life. That's why persistence and consistency are so important to this process.

Common Strongholds

Thus far we've mainly spoken in generalities where strongholds are concerned. Now let's get specific.

Rare is the Christian who doesn't deal with at least one of the following strongholds:

• Unbelief—This is a powerful and widespread stronghold. Example:You don't really believe in your heart that tithing will work, that healing is for you, or that prayer changes things.

• Cold Love—The inability to walk in love toward others. Example: A selfish husband who is insensitive toward his wife.

• Fear—Consistent and often irrational fear or dread of certain things. Examples: Fear of failure, fear of harm, fear of rejection.

• Unforgiveness—The inability to let go of hurts, grudges or offenses. Example: An adult who carries bitterness toward a mother or father for offenses in childhood.

• Lust—appetites that are out of control or consistent desires that are contrary to God's

Word. Examples: Food addictions, obsessive

sexual desires and coveting of other people's goods.

There are many other potential areas in which strongholds can be constructed in your thought life but those are a few of the most common ones.

Renewing your mind to the Word of God; replacing worldly patterns of thinking with biblical patterns; taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. All of these activities are in the realm of your mind, but they will ultimately have a profound impact on your outward behavior.

In addition to all the scriptures we've seen that support this principle, there is one more that brings this truth home:

For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he:

(Proverbs 23:7)

A major key to moving from slothfulness to diligence—from lasciviousness to discipline—is rooting out strongholds in your thinking.

I think it would be helpful at this point to stop and review some things.

You obviously want more discipline in your life. If that weren't true you wouldn't be reading this book. And you certainly wouldn't have stayed with me this far if you weren't hungry to change some things about the way you're living.

Thus far, we've seen that the outward behaviors we exhibit are actually the direct result of how we think. We've also seen that an ingrained pattern of wrong or negative thinking is called a stronghold. In the previous chapter we identified what strongholds are, and discovered both the weapon and strategy for eliminating them from our lives.

We saw that strongholds are basically demonically induced patterns of thinking that are contrary to the truth of God's Word. The more deeply entrenched the thinking pattern, the stronger the

stronghold.

We also saw that in order to remove a stronghold, you had to go where they exist—the mind.

Now that you know how to get free, I want to show you how to stay free. To do that, it's important that you understand where strongholds come from. Since we know that a stronghold is constructed of wrong thoughts, ideas and attitudes, it makes sense to ask the question, "Where do these false concepts come from?" If we can identify the source of these things, we are way ahead in being able to keep them from taking root in our thinking. There are

basically three sources that the enemy can use to produce strongholds in your life. In this chapter we'll explore them one at a time.

The World

When the New Testament talks about the world, it's usually not referring to the globe of planet earth. It's talking about the fallen world's system.

Jesus made frequent reference to the world in this sense when He taught His disciples:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (John 15:18, 19)

The world is the satanically inspired system of thinking and those who participate in it. As Jesus said in the verses above, this system hates Jesus and hates anyone connected to Him.

He said basically the same thing in the 17th chapter of John as He was praying to the Father about the Church:

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

Just as Jesus is the ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven, this world's system is a kingdom with a ruler, as well. Jesus spoke of this ruler just before He was betrayed:

Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. (John 14:30)

Jesus called Satan “the prince of this world.” In saying that, He meant Satan is the ruler of the

twisted, perverted part of creation that has not yet experienced redemption.

Paul made a similar reference in one of his letters to the Corinthians:

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (II Corinthians 4:4)

Notice what Paul says Satan has done to those in the world’s system. It said he has blinded their minds.

Here we clearly see that the world has a problem with its thinking. The people in the world have had their minds blinded by the devil.

In many other places in scripture the Word of God talks about the “wisdom of the world” or “man’s wisdom.” For example, in the second chapter of First Corinthians, Paul tells us that he is careful not to utilize this type of fallen thinking in his presentation of the gospel:

And my speech and my preaching was *not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (I Corinthians 2:4, 5)*

Do you see it? The world has ways of thinking but it is wrong thinking. It has a type of wisdom but it is fallen, corrupted wisdom. Because the world is satanically ruled and thoroughly corrupted, all thoughts, ideas and attitudes that come out of it are corrupt and false.

Do you see now how dangerous it is to adopt attitudes and thoughts that come out of the world? Do you understand how such corrupted thinking can produce the seed of a stronghold?

Now you know why apostles like Paul, John,

Peter and James were so forceful when talking about this subject. Take this familiar passage for example:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

James was even sterner in his warnings to believers about getting too cozy with the world's way of thinking:

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Now that's laying it on the line isn't it? You can't adopt the world's viewpoint on matters and remain a friend of God. Why? Because the world hates God. Jesus said so.

Listen to what John had to say on the subject:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (I John 2:15-17)

In this powerful passage, John gives us a quick breakdown of what you're going to get when you let thoughts and attitudes from the world infect your thinking. You're going to get:

1. The lust of the flesh.
2. The lust of the eyes.
3. The boastful pride of life.

Now doesn't that pretty much cover the kinds of

strongholds and behaviors we're trying to learn how to overcome?

Is food the problem? The lust of the flesh is the

source. Is inappropriate sexual desire the challenge? The lust of the eyes is involved. Is a strong need for status and power your stronghold? The boastful pride of life is at the root.

Child of God, you can't absorb the world's thinking without getting the world's results—and those results are bondage and death!

Yet I see believers doing it every day. They let television, Hollywood, the newscasters, their friends or a host of other sources communicate wrong ways of thinking to them. Instead of comparing those deceptive thoughts to the standard of God's Word and rejecting them if they fail to measure up, they just accept them instead.

Let me give you an example. According to this world's system, there is absolutely nothing wrong with a man and a woman being sexually involved outside of marriage. Television, movies, books, magazines and even the public education system all portray sex outside of marriage as "normal."

If you have any acquaintance with the Word of

God at all, you know what God's standards on the issue are. God says, "One man. One woman. For life. Period."

Why does God say that? Because he knows there is death and destruction outside of His system. He's not trying to spoil people's fun. He's trying to save their lives.

Yet I come across Christians all the time who are letting the world's thinking about sex pollute their minds. They saturate their minds with messages from the popular culture and then start wondering to themselves, "Does God really expect me to abstain until I'm married? He can't really mean that"

Do you see how it's possible for a thought or attitude from the world to become a stronghold of deception. This kind of deception is particularly deadly because it's anti-anointing.

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the

flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. (II John 1:7)

Deception will rob you of the anointing. And without the anointing, you can't have your burdens removed and your yokes destroyed.

When you allow yourself to be seduced by the world's way of thinking about things, you're actually deceiving yourself. In First Corinthians, chapter three, Paul warns us about self-deception and adopting the corrupted wisdom of the world:

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. (I Corinthians 3:18-20)

In a similar vein, James warns us about allowing ourselves to buy into the world's wisdom:

This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and

strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. (James 3:15-17)

Today, the satanic world's system is sending you a steady stream of thoughts, ideas and attitudes. If you take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ and cast down every lofty thing that exalts

itself above the knowledge of God, you're not going to be infected by them.

If, on the other hand, you allow the world to color your thinking, you're susceptible to the construction of a stronghold of some sort, and I can assure you, you won't like the end result.

Your Personal Experience and Conclusions

The world's system isn't the only source of potential strongholds in your thinking. There is

another avenue I see being used against believers all the time. That avenue is within them.

You see, we all have a tendency to view the world through the lens of our own experience. Our perception of reality is greatly influenced by our past experiences and the conclusions we draw from them.

There's just one problem with that. Your experience is not a valid standard of truth. Your finite human mind doesn't always draw valid conclusions.

The only infallible, accurate standard for truth in the earth is the Word of God. That's why Paul wrote:

... Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar... (Romans 3:4 NASB)

In other words, if every man on earth is saying left and the Word of God says right, go with the Word of God.

You need to include yourself in that. If your experience and logic tell you one thing but the Word of God says something different—go with the Word.

You can't trust your experience. You can't trust your

fallen, human reason.

This is the very area in which so many Christians have a hard time. Someone goes up in a healing line

for prayer and, for whatever reason, they don't see the manifestation of their healing.

Based on their experience, they draw a conclusion: "Healing isn't for me. I know God heals some people, but He must not heal everyone because I didn't get healed." Now, on the face of it, that sounds like a logical conclusion based on experience. There's just one problem with it. It's contrary to the Word of God.

I Peter 2:21 says:

[Jesus,] Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Matthew 12:15 tells us, *"Jesus healed them all."*

On almost a daily basis you're going to be faced

with this decision. Either you're going to go with what your experience and senses tell you, or with what the Word says about the situation.

I don't want any strongholds operating in my life so I'm going with the Word.

Religion and False Doctrine

There is a third common source for wrong thinking. Ironically, people often get infected with this kind right inside the walls of their local church. I'm talking about concepts and ideas that spring from religious tradition and false teaching.

Much of what is communicated and emphasized in religious circles today has absolutely nothing to do with the truth of God's Word. That shouldn't come as a big surprise though, because the same was true in Jesus' day.

Jesus was God incarnate. A living, breathing

representation of God's nature and will. Yet, He was constantly in trouble with the religious leaders that

were supposedly dedicated to serving God.

How could that be? Jesus Himself exposed the nature of the problem. Somewhere along the way religious tradition had become more important than the truth of God's will and ways.

In one encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus laid it on the line to them. He told them:

And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me.' (Matthew 15:6, 7 NASB)

He delivered a similar message on another occasion. He told a group of religious leaders that they were...

Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. (Mark 7:13)

Did you catch that? Jesus told them they had managed to make the mighty, powerful, creative Word of God of none effect through their religious

traditions.

Strongholds of religious tradition and false teaching will do the same thing in your life.

That's why it's so vital that you test everything you hear against the standard of God's Word (including what you're reading in this book right now!)

Paul praised the Christians at Berea because they were open to the things of God, but were careful to check everything out against the standard of the Word:

Now these were more noble-minded than those

in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. (Acts 17:11 NASB)

Just because a man with degrees or a title says something, it doesn't make it so. God's Word encourages us to test everything carefully.

Look, for example at Paul's advice to the Colossians:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

False teaching will spoil you. That's means to make rotten or corrupt. How does that happen? False church doctrines and teaching can shape your patterns of thinking in ways that make it difficult or impossible for you to operate in the anointing. There are entire denominations that experienced the power and presence of God at one time in their history. Now nothing remains but form and tradition. Their traditions have made the Word of no effect.

Other segments of Christianity will tell you that God doesn't heal anymore. Yet in the Bible God says, *"I am the God that healeth thee." (Exodus 15:26)*

Others will tell you that there are no longer any apostles or prophets. "Those offices passed away in

the first century," they tell you. Yet the fourth chapter of Ephesians tells us that these offices will remain until we all come together in the unity of the faith and have attained the full stature of Jesus!

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the

work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (Ephesians 4:11-13)

I could cite example after example but the point is, if you let these unbiblical religious teachings sink into your thinking, they will rob you of faith and confidence where these matters are concerned. You'll miss out on the power and blessing God has made available to you because you won't have any faith or expectation to receive them.

It shouldn’t come as a surprise to discover that Christians who have been taught (wrongly) that God doesn’t want them to prosper, aren’t experiencing very much prosperity.

Believers who have been taught that healing passed away with the apostles don’t get healed very often.

These are strongholds. Deeply entrenched deceptions that spring from religious tradition and false doctrine.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Now that you know where the seeds of strongholds are likely to come from, you can be on your guard and keep them from ever getting planted.

Make sure you’re not absorbing unbiblical thoughts and ideas from:

• The world.

• Your own experience and conclusions.

• Religious tradition.

If you’ll hold every thought and attitude up to the standard of God’s Word, rightly divided, you’ll stay

free from strongholds and the destructive consequences they bring.

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Chapter 11

Be coming a Person of Discipline

11

Diligence.

Slothfulness.

Lasciviousness.

Strongholds.

We've examined a number of different Bible terms in the preceding pages. Each term has shown us a different aspect of what is involved in becoming a person of discipline. A person who controls their appetites rather than having their appetites control them. A person who, as Paul said, knows how to possess the vessel of their body:

... That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; (I

Thessalonians 4:4, NASB)

This is the kind of person that gave Paul such joy:

For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. (Colossians 2:5 NASB)

Discipline and stability of faith go together. As you become a more disciplined person, you'll find that your faith is becoming stronger and more effective.

You'll also find yourself becoming bolder, less fearful and timid. That's why Paul was able to tell Timothy:

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. (II Timothy 1:7 NASB)

That's a verse you need to stand on. You need to meditate on it. You need to lay hold of it in faith. You

don’t need discipline. You need to bring forth the spirit of discipline God has already given you.

I hope you realize by now that discipline isn’t a dirty word. It’s a Bible word. Being disciplined isn’t a prison. It’s freedom.

Freedom from slavery to your appetites. Freedom from bondage to sin. Freedom from guilt, shame and self-hatred.

Disciplined Christians are the freest people in the world.

There is an anointing of discipline. It’s the power of God to remove the burdens of lasciviousness and destroy the yokes of strongholds like addiction.

You’ll experience that anointing as you press into the Anointed One Himself.

As I’ve said many times in many ways throughout this book, when it comes down to basics, becoming a person of discipline and diligence is all about filling yourself with Jesus.

As you fill your mind, heart and mouth with His Word... As you spend time fellowshipping with Him

in His presence... As you are transformed into His likeness through the renewing of your mind to His Word, you'll find the old cravings, bondages and habits simply falling away on their own. Jesus was a person of extraordinary discipline. You'll be disciplined too, as you become more like Him.

Child of God, Jesus wants you to be free. And true freedom can only come as you learn to overcome the weaknesses of your flesh, and to resist the attempts of the enemy to re-enslave you.

As I close, consider the words of Galatians 5:1:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free;

therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (NASB)

Keep standing firm. The Anointed One and His Anointing has set you free!

About the Author

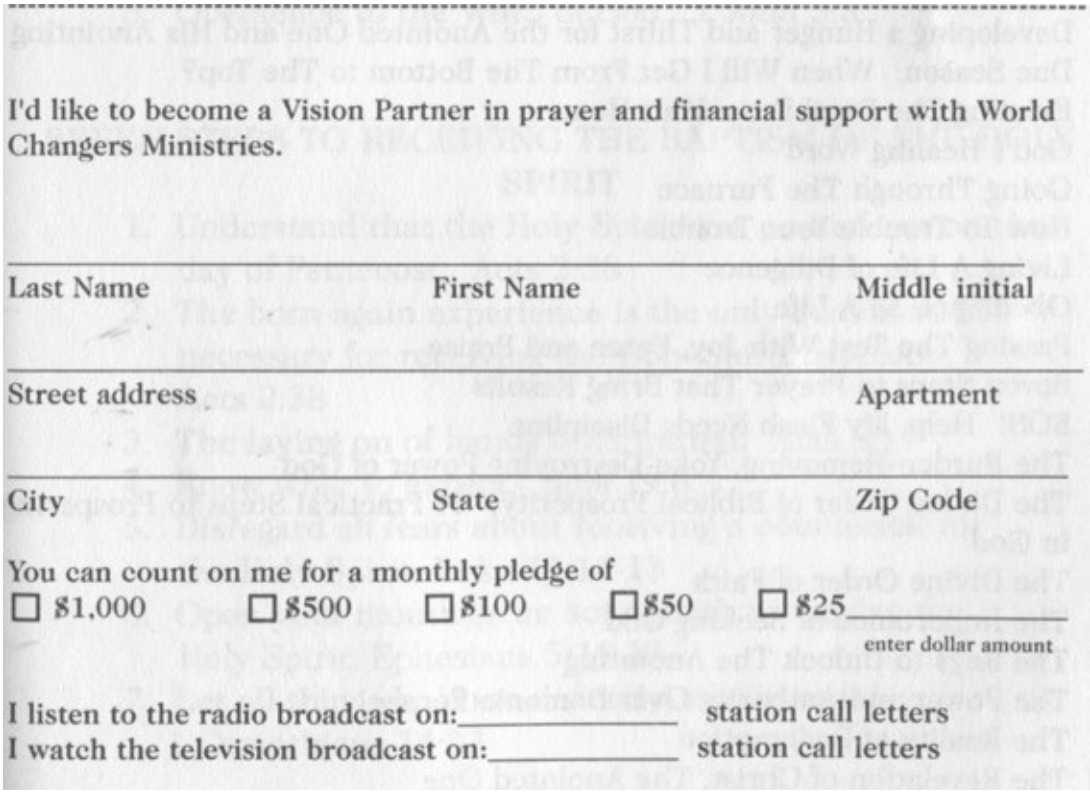
Biography of Dr. Creflo A. Dollar Jr.

Dr. Creflo A. Dollar Jr. was born and raised in College Park, Georgia. After graduating from Lakeshore High School, he obtained a Bachelor of Education degree with a concentration in History from West Georgia College in Carrollton, Georgia. He began his professional career as a high school teacher in the Fulton County school system. From there, he became an Educational Therapist for Brawner Psychiatric Institute Of Atlanta.

In 1986, Dr. Creflo Dollar began to carry out the call which God had placed on his life, by starting World Changers Christian Center, a non-denominational church in College Park. Pastor Dollar began the ministry at a local elementary school with only eight people. At that time, the ministry was small and aimed at developing a solid foundation for the fulfillment of a larger vision. He now pastors a church of over 17,000 people, and is an internationally known author, teacher and conference speaker with a ministry that not only reaches the local community, but also spans the

globe. He can be seen and heard throughout the world on the “Changing Your World” broadcast, via television and radio. Dr. Dollar also conducts conventions across the U. S. and around the world.

Dr. Creflo A. Dollar Jr. and his wife, Taffi, live in Atlanta, Georgia. They have five children—Gregory, Jeremy, Jordan, Alexandria and Lauren Grace.



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The Importance of Seeking God

The Keys to Unlock The Anointing

The Power and Authority Over Demonic Forces

The Reality of Redemption

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What is the Kingdom of God?

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The Sinner’s Prayer

Father, in the name of Jesus, I confess right now, and realize that I am a sinner. I repent of all my sins. I make an 180-degree turn away from all my sins. I

change my heart, I change my mind, I change my direction, and I turn toward Jesus Christ. I confess with my mouth that God raised Jesus from the dead, and I believe in my heart that Jesus is alive and operates in my life. I thank you Lord that I am saved. Amen.

STEPS TO SALVATION

1. Admit, recognize that you are a sinner. Psalm 51:5

2. Repentance. 1 John 1:9

3. Confession. Romans 10:9-10

4. Baptisms—Water/Holy Spirit. Matthew 3:6

5. Obedience to the Word of God. 1 John 5:3

SEVEN STEPS TO RECEIVING THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Understand that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:38

2. The born-again experience is the only qualification necessary for receiving the Holy-Spirit baptism. Acts 2:38

3. The laying on of hands is scriptural. Acts 8:17

4. Know what to expect. Acts 19:6

5. Disregard all fears about receiving a

counterfeit for the Holy Spirit. Luke 11:11-13

6. Open your mouth as an act of faith to receive

the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18-19

7. Let all things be done decently, and in order.

1 Corinthians 14:33

In his ongoing war waged against Christians, the devil is fighting with yet another weapon designed to stop those of us who have heard the inspiring message of Christ, The Anointed One and His Anointing. Satan is attempting to use slothfulness as a means by which to stop believers from obtaining the victory God has promised in His Word.

In this life-changing book, Creflo A. Dollar Jr. shows us that The Anointing of Discipline is our counterattack against this demonic solicitation. He teaches that when we are led by our spirit, we will not be controlled by our flesh.

"God never designed your physical man to be in control. He intended for you to develop your spirit in line with His Word."

Creflo A. Dollar Jr.

Take the steps necessary to operate in this powerful anointing which is a prerequisite to victorious living. The Word will work for you, if you work the Word-- and that Child of God, takes discipline!

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