



INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE

A Seminary Program for Training Christian Leaders

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Leading the Overcoming Life

Have you ever known anyone with a great love for the Lord, yet enslaved by greed and the desire for material things? Or maybe you have encountered a person full of God given insight and wisdom, who loves God's Word, yet can be instantly consumed with anger, a slave to fury and rage? Have you heard about any great men of God that have fallen, entrapped by their own lust?

Each of us know Christians who love Jesus, but remain weak because their life is rife with besetting sin. They want to be free; they struggle and fight, wrestling with their desires and impulses, making valiant but unsuccessful attempts to conquer their sin. This conflict may continue for years as they achieve small temporary victories, just to fall back under sins control. They live defeated lives, caught in a never-ending cycle of victory and failure.

Some continue faithfully to battle; others give up in frustration, surrendering to futility; overcome by their own sinful nature. Instead of leading victorious empowered lives as vessels fit for the Master's use, they are caught in a vicious trap, mired in sin, ineffective and unfit for use. *Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin."* (John 8:34) Sin is their master; they are slaves to it. It is bondage so strong they cannot break its hold.

This inability to break the hold sin has on them does not come from a lack of effort on their part. No matter how hard or long they battle, they will not, nor cannot overcome. They are unable to free themselves from slavery, because **they do not know how**. No one has ever taught them *how to overcome their sin, how to break their bondage*.

In this article I condense key points taken from my teaching series "How to Live the Life of an Overcomer." For the sake of brevity I left out examples of my own struggles to be free. I simply give the basic "keys" explaining **how to** have victory over sin. Each key could consume a whole message or newsletter by itself. If you desire deeper insight on any of these points, I encourage you to listen to the series.

How to Live the Life of an Overcomer

Is it possible to have victory over the sin which rules our life? Can we be loosed from our bondage to that sin? Can we overcome sin? The answer to each of these questions is a definite YES!

Sin no longer has to control us! Rather than spending all our energy in constant battle, rigorously defending our heart against sinful desires, we can put our time and energy toward serving our Lord.

How do we get strength to overcome sin? How are we able to conquer those sins that have consistently conquered us? How do we achieve final victory over those sins which just as we seem to achieve victory, rise again, take control of us, and lead us back into slavery? Here are a few keys explaining how to have freedom from your bondage to sin. We cannot do any of these on our own, each key must be accomplished by asking Jesus to do it in us.

Key One: Look at Your Sin Through God's Eyes

One reason sin is so difficult to conquer is that although our spirit wants to stop, our flesh still desires to sin. This is especially true of sins like materialism (covetousness), greed, anger, unforgiveness, lust, envy, pride, bitterness, gossip, etc. Our flesh and spirit both call to our mind. Our flesh tries to make sin so desirous our mind cannot resist. Our spirit resists this crying out from within, no no no! This is the battleground of our mind. Our flesh and spirit each try to grab the upper hand. This struggle is described in Romans 7:17-25.

The first key to overcoming any sin is to see sin the way God sees it. You may already hate your sin; you may even think you understand how horrible it is; but when you know, feel, and understand God's loathing for your sin, then you have taken the first step toward being delivered from it. God HATES sin! We need to deep down in our heart hate our sin. The more we see our sin the way God sees it, the weaker and less desirous the hold it has on our mind becomes.

As we begin to reach this stage, we often cry out to God saying: "I am sorry. Lord, forgive me." Thinking we have repented of our sin. Do not be fooled, hating the sin in us and asking for forgiveness **is not repentance**. It is simply the sorrow that leads to repentance. "*Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*" (2 Corinthians 7:9,10)

How do we come to see and feel about our sin the way God does? Simple, just ask. Take a few minutes to pray; ask God to show you His heart concerning your sin. Look up passages in the Bible that express God's feeling and reaction toward that sin. (*A good concordance of the Bible is helpful for this. Remember there can be several words that describe the same sinful area of the heart, such as greed/covetousness, anger/wrath/rage, etc.*) Allow your heart to be filled with His thoughts and emotions, His loathing toward your sin.

Key Two: Confess Your Sins, Ask for Forgiveness

The second key to having victory over sin is to confess it, asking God's forgiveness. Confession is often overlooked in our battle to free ourselves from sin. God promises if we confess our sins He not only will forgive our sins but cleanse us from unrighteousness. (John 1:9) A righteous person is sin free. Being cleansed from all unrighteousness includes being made sinless. Without confession, you **will not** be cleansed of your sin; you will still be its slave; it will still control you.

You can confess some sins to God alone and rid yourself of them, others you will need to confess openly. If we feel we must keep our sin secret, we have not yet fully repented of it. If because of shame or a secret desire to continue, you feel you need to hide your sin, than that is a sin you should confess to another brother or sister*. *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes [them] will have mercy."* (Proverbs 28:13) There can be no victory over a secret sin; you are still a slave to it. You cannot hide it. As long as it is hidden, it will come back and destroy.

I have had sins that I was so ashamed of I felt I could not tell anyone. As long as I kept them secret, they still had power over me and I was unable to have victory over them. Once I openly told others my sin, then the power they had was broken. *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* (James 5:16) Once we confess our sin; asking God's forgiveness, we are cleansed from unrighteousness. We become righteous in God's eyes and He hears our prayer.

Before going to the next key, take a few moments to examine your heart; ask God to show you if you have any sin you need to confess to Him or others. Confess those sins, ask Him to forgive you. It is helpful to do this aloud before God, confessing your sins one by one and asking His forgiveness for each.

Receive His forgiveness. I find it helpful not only to ask forgiveness one by one but receive His forgiveness for each sin; saying something like "In the name of Jesus, I receive Your forgiveness for ... sin. I accept you have removed it from me, and will remember it no more. Thank you." Outward acceptance of forgiveness can help to cement that

forgiveness in our heart. In the same way, if you are confessing your sin to another brother or sister, it can be helpful to have them lay hands on you and proclaim God's forgiveness. *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* (John 20:23) In this way it can be easier for you to let go of your sin.

NOTE This does not mean you go around telling everyone your sins. Use wisdom and discretion. Tell those who are proven to be faithful, not gossips or slanderers. Choose mature Christians, who do not talk about others and who can give wise godly counsel.*

Key Three: Flee Sin

One way sin keeps us in slavery is to "set us up" to fall. It is arrogance, pride, or stupidity, if we think we can be around sin and not be tempted and fall. Often we do not even realize sin subtly guides us into compromising situations. By allowing ourselves to be in a position where we become tempted we have already set ourselves up to fall. We have made provision for our flesh. *"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."* (Romans 13:14)

For example: If you are addicted to pornography, do not allow yourself to be near it or around it; avoid stores that sell it; never get on the internet when you are alone, etc. When we through pride believe we are strong enough to fight sin, we will fail. *"Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18)

When temptation comes our automatic response is to fight. This is wrong! The correct response is to **RUN!!!!!!**; *"Flee sexual immorality..."* (1 Cor 6:18) *"Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry..."* (1 Cor 10:14) *"Flee also youthful lusts..."* (2 Timothy 2:22) Staying and battling is the last choice not the first. No one is immune to sin. There is no disgrace in admitting weakness.

Key Four: Recognize You are Powerless

Key Five: Give Up, Stop Fighting

Key Six: Ask God to Remove Your Sin

Because keys Four, through Six are closely related I will condense and discuss them together.

The more we see and hate our sin, the more we try to fight it. However as we try to fight sin, it becomes stronger, not weaker. We find we are powerless to stop. *But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.* (Romans 7:8) As we grit our teeth, steeling ourselves up, determined to obey God's law, sin comes alive within us.

It is difficult to stop ourselves from battling sin, but we must stop! We see our sin. We hate our sin! But we do not fight our sin. Instead, we must hand our sin to Jesus asking Him to remove it. Only once we stop fighting, and rely on Jesus to take it away, can we achieve final victory.

God not only forgives but removes it as well. *“As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” (Psalms 103:12)* From beginning to the end, Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. He alone has power to change us. *“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13)* It is God’s responsibility, not yours, to remove your sin.

When we attempt to use our own strength, gritting our teeth, steeling ourselves up, battling to live life without sinning, we are trying to do God’s work for Him. **STOP!** God does not need our help. He already took our sins with Him to the cross. By interfering and trying to clean up our own life, we are in a sense denying the power of the cross. We, by human effort, try to do what Jesus says He will do for us, if we will let Him. We cannot rely on His strength until we stop trying to use our own. Ask God to remove your sin. Give God complete responsibility. Ask Him; depend on Him; trust Him. He will do it!

Key Seven: Recognize You are Dead to Sin

Once we truly understand that Christ’s death not only sets us free from the penalty of sin but also from our bondage to sin, we can stop fighting. Through Jesus’ death on the cross we not only have our sin washed away; we are dead to its power. When we ask Jesus to take our sins from us He does. He already took our sin to the cross with Him. *“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness...” (1 Peter 2:24)* Sin has no power over us anymore. Sin no longer can control us. *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.” (Romans 6:6,7)*

Why then are we still in bondage to it? Since the power sin had over us was destroyed at the cross, why then does it still control us? How do we get our lives to match up with what the scripture says “that henceforth we should not serve sin”? The answer is given a few verses later. *“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:11)*

We are dead to sin! Just as you cannot force a dead slave to work, sin cannot have you do its bidding. If we still believe we are slaves to sin then we still are. The key is realizing (reckon) in our mind and heart that we are free, dead to sin. Sin is now powerless to affect us, much less control us. We are dead to it.

You cannot act, feel or behave like you are free if you do not know you are free. Only after you truly know and believe deep in your heart that the sin no longer has power to control you. You are released from its hold. It is then, it actually takes effect and you can relax, allowing yourself to stop battling.

Key Eight: Choose a New Master

We are still slaves, but now we have a choice whom we will serve. Now we have the opportunity to choose to be a slave to righteousness instead of sin. If we do not submit ourselves to a new master, we will once again fall victim to our old one. We are dead to sin, but our old habits and ways were subservient to it. In order to not fall again under the control of sin we must dedicate ourselves as slaves of righteousness. With full purpose and thought, we need to actively present (yield) our members (each part of our body, soul, and mind) as instruments (weapons) of righteousness. *“And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” (Romans 6:13)*

Simply pray, telling God you are committing yourself to be used by Him today. I find it helpful to name each part that comes to mind as I pray this, committing to God to use that part of me as a weapon for His service today.

When you do this think about what you are doing. As you dedicate each part of you, realize it is not just passively given. Find some way to use that part for God. IE: If you give your hands to be slaves of righteousness, then use your hands today in the service of God. Or if you dedicate your mind to Him, use your mind for God today. When we dedicate our self as a slave of righteousness, it is not some fancy verbiage we do to be free from sin, we truly dedicate ourselves to becoming a slave of righteousness

Paul continues through the end of the chapter telling us that we have to choose. We are either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. *vs 16, 18-20; “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?...And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.”*

Key Nine: Take off the Old - Put on the New

The ninth key takes all that we have already done in our mind, heart and actions from the first eight keys and unites them into one cohesive action that results in sin leaving us and our being able to lead a victorious life.

Paul describes getting rid of sin simply as putting it off, the same way we do our clothing. He also describes us putting on godly character as easily as putting on clean clothes. *“The night is far spent, the*

day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”(Romans 13:12)

It sounds so simple. But is it? The answer is an overwhelming YES!!! Because we have tried so hard in the past to rid ourselves of sin, we tend to think of this last key as being harder than it sounds. Ridding our self of sin is as simple as Paul describes it. As simple as taking off dirty clothes and putting on clean clothes.

In Ephesians 4:22-32 and Colossians 3:5-14, Paul tells us to take off such sins as: deceitful lusts, lying, corrupt words, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, (which is idolatry) malice, and blasphemy. These verses also tell us to put on Christian traits and characteristics such as: kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, speaking truth, imparting grace, tenderhearted , bearing with one another, forgiving one another , and above all these things putting on love, which is the bond of perfection.

Thankfully Paul did not simply tell us to put off the old sinful nature and put on a new godly one; he gave us the mechanism to accomplish it. Between telling us to take off the old Man and put on the new Paul says we must be **renewed in our mind**. Our mind is the pivot point between taking off the old and putting on the new. *“that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)*

After we ask God to remove our sin we let go of it so completely we forget it and no longer think about it. Then we turn our minds toward seeking what God would replace in us. *“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.” (Philippians 3:13-15)*

Do as you have been instructed, change your focus. Do not allow yourself to think about the past, only the future. **STOP thinking about the old sin that controlled you.** You are dead to it. God will remove it. Instead look to what God wants to place in you. This is the means by which we become transformed We become free from sin, and a true servant of the Lord.

Just as when we take off dirty clothes; turn our backs to it; walk to our closet; choose what we will wear, and put on clean clothes. We take off our old sin; turn from it leaving it behind; we decide what we will wear; reach for it; grab hold of it, and put it on.

It is almost impossible to take off old dirty clothes, go pick out and put on our clean clothes while we are still watching our dirty clothes. We have to take our eyes off the old and put them on the new. We cannot pick out the right shirt or the right pants while still concerned with the dirty laundry. We need to totally let go of the old and put all our attention on acquiring new in order to dress properly. In the same manner it is almost impossible to take off our old sinful nature (old man), leave it behind and put on our new man if we have not let go and turned from the old.

God will do it all for you! Ask Him to give you a new mind. Ask Him to remove the old. Ask Him what new trait He would replace it with. Ask Him to place the new character in you. Start praying and yielding yourself as an instrument of righteousness. Allow God to begin developing spiritual fruit in you, building new godly character.

When is a thief no longer a thief?

When we stop sinning our character does not change. It is not when a person stops sinning they are transformed but when they begin moving the opposite direction. We need to take off the old and put on new character.

When a thief stops stealing, is he still a thief? *Yes!* His character has not changed. Even if he stops stealing because he hates his sin, he is still a thief. He simply is a thief that has not stolen anything recently. *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.” (Ephesians 4:28)* If the thief wants to stop being a thief, he needs to change his character. His selfish desires that prompted him to steal must become transformed into a heart of giving. Only when he no longer has a selfish heart and works so that he can give is he truly transformed and is no longer a thief.

The process of repentance is what we have been describing in this newsletter. This process will set you free from sin. It is the power of true repentance. True repentance done God’s way releases us from sin. The Greek word for repentance, μετανοεω” metanaeo has two meanings. It means to be renewed in your mind or have a new mind. It also means to turn and go opposite direction. BOTH apply. It is God’s transforming power to change us. *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what [is] that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2)*

If anyone you know is trapped by their sin; please feel free to share or teach from this newsletter. I hope that it can help free those that find themselves in bondage unable to escape. AMEN

Doug Heil