A photograph of a sunlit forest. Tall, thin trees stand in rows, with sunlight streaming through the canopy, creating a bright, hazy atmosphere. In the foreground, there is a dense field of green ferns. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

A Victorious Relationship With God

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Forward

"Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

To overcome is to be victorious by believing in Christ, persevering, remaining faithful, and living as one who follows Christ. Such a life brings great rewards (Rev. 21:7).

Our journey with God is a lifelong process, and the changes and victories may take time. It is easy to grow impatient with God and feel like giving up hope because things are moving too slowly. When we are close to a situation, it is difficult to see progress. But when we look back we can see that God never stopped working.

As you study these examples of victory, may you become victorious in Christ.

Chapter 1



Focusing on negative can rob us of victory

Deut. 1:23-40

This seemed like a good idea to me, so I chose twelve scouts, one from each of your tribes. They crossed into the hills and came to the valley of Eshcol and explored it.

They picked some of its fruit and brought it back to us. And they reported that the land the Lord our God had given us was indeed a good land.

"But you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God and refused to go in. You murmured and complained in your tents and said, 'The Lord must hate us, bringing us here from Egypt to be slaughtered by these Amorites.

How can we go on? Our scouts have demoralized us with their report. They say that the people of the land are taller and more powerful than we are, and that the walls of their towns rise high into the sky! They have even seen giants there—the descendants of Anak!"

"But I said to you, 'don't be afraid! The Lord your God is going before you. He will fight for you, just as you saw him do in Egypt.

And you saw how the Lord your God cared for you again and again here in the wilderness, just as a father cares for his child. Now he has brought you to this place.'

But even after all he did, you refused to trust the Lord your God, who goes before you looking for the best places to camp, guiding you by a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud by day.

"When the Lord heard your complaining, he became very angry. So he solemnly swore, 'Not one of you from this entire wicked generation will live to see the good land I swore to give your ancestors, except Caleb son of Jephunneh.

He will see this land because he has followed the Lord completely. I will give to him and his descendants some of the land he walked over during his scouting mission.'

"And the Lord was also angry with me because of you. He said to me, 'You will never enter the Promised Land!

Instead, your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will lead the people into the land. Encourage him as he prepares to enter it.

I will give the land to your innocent children. You were afraid they would be captured, but they will be the ones who occupy it.

As for you, turn around now and go on back through the wilderness toward the Red Sea.'

Moses retold the story of the spy mission into the promised land (Numbers 13; Numbers 14).

When the spies returned with reports of giants (Anakites) and walled cities, the people were afraid to move ahead and began to complain about their predicament.

But the minority report of Joshua and Caleb pointed out that the land was fertile, the enemy was vulnerable, and God was on their side. We become fearful and immobile when we focus on the negative aspects of a situation.

It is better to focus on the positive—God’s direction and promises. When confronted with an important decision and you know what you should do, move out in faith. Focus on the positives while trusting God to overcome the negatives. Problems don’t have to rob you of the victory.

Canaan was a land with giants and imposing fortresses. The “Anakites” may have been seven to nine feet tall. Many of the land’s fortified cities had walls as high as 30 feet. The Israelites’ fear was understandable, but not justified, for the all-powerful God had already promised them victory.

Finding victory despite the odds

Joshua 11:1-5

When King Jabin of Hazor heard what had happened, he sent urgent messages to the following kings:

King Jobab of Madon;

**The king of Shimron;
The king of Acshaph;
All the kings of the northern hill country;
The kings in the Jordan Valley south of Galilee;
The kings in the western foothills; the kings of Naphoth-dor on the west;
The kings of Canaan, both east and west; the kings of the Amorites;
The kings of the Hittites;
The kings of the Perizzites;
The kings in the Jebusite hill country; and the Hivites in the towns on the slopes of Mount Hermon, in the land of Mizpah.**

All these kings responded by mobilizing their warriors and uniting to fight against Israel.

Their combined armies, along with a vast array of horses and chariots, covered the landscape like the sand on the seashore. They established their camp around the water near Merom to fight against Israel.

There were two kings of Hazor named Jabin. The other, apparently a weak ruler, is mentioned in Judges 4:2-3.

The Jabin of this story was quite powerful because he was able to build an alliance with dozens of kings. By all appearances, Jabin had a clear advantage over Joshua and his outnumbered forces. But those who honor God can be victorious regardless of the odds.

Victory often takes a lot of time.

Joshua 11:18

Waging war for a long time to accomplish this.

The conquest of much of the land of Canaan seems to have happened quickly (we can read about it in one sitting), but it actually took seven years. We often expect quick changes in our lives and quick victories over sin.

But our journey with God is a lifelong process, and the changes and victories may take time. It is easy to grow impatient with God and feel like giving up hope because things are moving too slowly. When we are close to a situation, it is difficult to see progress. But when we look back we can see that God never stopped working.

Victory depends upon obedience and commitment.

Judges 7:2

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength."

Self-sufficiency is an enemy when it causes us to believe we can always do what needs to be done in our own strength. To prevent this attitude among Gideon's soldiers, God reduced their number from 32,000 to 300. With an army this small, there could be no doubt that victory was from God.

The men could not take the credit. Like Gideon, we must recognize the danger of fighting in our own strength. We can be confident of victory only if we put our confidence in God and not ourselves.

Temptation often comes after victory

2 Chron. 25:14

When King Amaziah returned from defeating the Edomites, he brought with him idols taken from the people of Seir. He set them up as his own gods, bowed down in front of them, and presented sacrifices to them!

After the victory, Amaziah returned and sacrificed to idols. We are very susceptible to sin after great victories. It is then that we feel confident, relaxed, and ready to celebrate. If, in that excitement, we let our defenses down, Satan can attack with all sorts of temptations. When you win, watch out. After the mountain peaks come the valleys.

Luke 4:1

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit to go out into the wilderness,

Sometimes we feel that if the Holy Spirit leads us, it will always be “beside quiet waters” (Psalm 23:2). But that is not necessarily true. He led Jesus into the desert for a long and difficult time of testing, and he may also lead us into difficult situations.

When facing trials, first make sure you haven't brought them on yourself through sin or unwise choices. If you find no sin to confess or unwise behavior to change, then ask God to strengthen you for your test. Finally, be careful to follow faithfully wherever the Holy Spirit leads.

Temptation will often come after a high point in our spiritual lives or ministries (see 1 Kings 18-19 for Elijah's story of great victory followed by despair). Remember that Satan chooses the times for his attacks. We need to be on our guard in times of victory just as much as in times of discouragement.

**Victory comes from continually renewing
our relationship with God.**

1 Samuel 4:5-8

When the Israelites saw the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord coming into the camp, their shout of joy was so loud that it made the ground shake!

"What's going on?" the Philistines asked. "What's all the shouting about in the Hebrew camp?" When they were told it was because the Ark of the Lord had arrived, they panicked.

"The gods have come into their camp!" they cried. "This is a disaster! We have never had to face anything like this before!"

Who can save us from these mighty gods of Israel? They are the same gods who destroyed the Egyptians with plagues when Israel was in the wilderness.

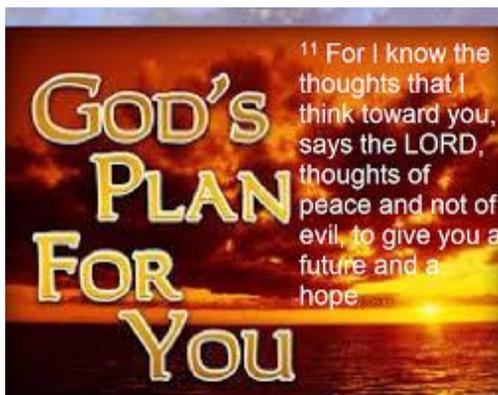
The Philistines were afraid because they remembered stories about God's intervention for Israel when they left Egypt. But Israel had turned away from God and was clinging to only a form of godliness, a symbol of former victories.

People (and churches) often try to live on the memories of God's blessings. The Israelites wrongly assumed that because God had given

them victory in the past, he would do it again, even though they had strayed far from him.

Today, as in Bible times, spiritual victories come through a continually renewed relationship with God. Don't live off the past. Keep your relationship with God new and fresh.

Chapter 2



Small steps lead to great victories.

1 Samuel 12:14

"Now if you will fear and worship the Lord and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the Lord's commands, and if you and your king follow the Lord your God, then all will be well.

God granted the nation's request for a king, but his commands and requirements remained the same. God was to be their true King, and both Saul and the people were to be subject to his laws.

No person is ever exempt from God's laws. No human action is outside his jurisdiction. God is the true King of every area of life. We must recognize his kingship and pattern our relationships, work life, and home life according to his principles.

Why Saul's victory was a failure to God

1 Samuel 15:13-14

When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. "May the Lord bless you," he said. "I have carried out the Lord's command!"

"Then what is all the bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle I hear?" Samuel demanded.

Saul thought he had won a great victory over the Amalekites, but God saw it as a great failure because Saul had disobeyed him and then lied to Samuel about the results of the battle.

Saul may have thought his lie wouldn't be detected, or that what he did was not wrong. Saul was deceiving himself.

Dishonest people soon begin to believe the lies they construct around themselves. Then they lose the ability to tell the difference between truth and lies.

By believing your own lies you deceive yourself, you will alienate yourself from God, and you will lose credibility in all your relationships. In the long run, honesty wins out.

Don't let fear keep you from victory

1 Chron. 11:12-14

Next in rank among the Three was Eleazar son of Dodai, a descendant of Ahoah. He was with David in the battle against the Philistines at Pas-dammim.

The battle took place in a field full of barley, and the Israelite army fled. But Eleazar and David held their ground in the middle of the field and beat back the Philistines. So the Lord saved them by giving them a great victory.

Eleazar's action changed the course of a battle. When everyone around him ran, he held his ground and was saved by the Lord. In any struggle, fear can keep us from taking a stand for God and from participating in God's victories.

Face your fear head on. If you are grounded in God, victory will come when you hold that ground.

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Acknowledge God's role in victory

1 Chron. 18:13

He placed army garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became David's subjects. This was another example of how the Lord made David victorious wherever he went.

The list of battles in this chapter shows how God gave David victory after victory.

Unbelieving people think that victory comes from their own skill plus a little luck. Just as David acknowledged God's role in his success, so should we.

Don't take credit for the work God does.

Victory comes from recognizing you can't win alone.

2 Chron. 4:11

Huram-abi also made the necessary pots, shovels, and basins. So at last Hiram-abi completed everything King Solomon had assigned him to make for the Temple of God:

Pots, shovels, and bowls—these are implements of worship unfamiliar to us. Although the articles we use to aid our worship have changed, the purpose of worship remains the same—to give honor and praise to God. We must never let our worship of God be overshadowed by things we use to help us worship him.

Chapter 3



Depression often comes after victory

1 Kings 19:3

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there.

Elijah experienced the depths of fatigue and discouragement just after his two great spiritual victories: the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the answered prayer for rain.

Often discouragement sets in after great spiritual experiences, especially those requiring physical effort or involving great emotion.

To lead him out of depression, God first let Elijah rest and eat.

Then God confronted him with the need to return to his mission—to speak God's words in Israel.

Elijah's battles were not over; there was still work for him to do. When you feel let down after a great spiritual experience, remember that God's purpose for your life is not yet over.

God has won final victory over Satan.

Ephes. 4:8

That is why the Scriptures say, "When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people."

In Psalm 68:18, God is pictured as a conqueror marching to the gates and taking tribute from the fallen city. Paul uses that picture to teach that Christ, in his crucifixion and resurrection, was victorious over Satan. When Christ ascended to heaven, he gave gifts to the church, some of which Paul discusses in Ephes. 4:11-13.

Victory comes through faith.

Hebrews 11:32-35

Well, how much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.

By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight.

Women received their loved ones back again from death.

But others trusted God and were tortured, preferring to die rather than turn from God and be free. They placed their hope in the resurrection to a better life.

The Old Testament records the lives of the various people who experienced these great victories. Joshua and Deborah conquered

kingdoms (the book of Joshua; Judges 4-5). Nehemiah administered justice (the book of Nehemiah).

Daniel was saved from the mouths of lions (Daniel 6).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were kept from harm in the furious flames of a fiery furnace (Daniel 3).

Elijah escaped the edge of the swords of evil Queen Jezebel's henchmen (1 Kings 19:2ff).

Hezekiah regained strength after sickness (2 Kings 20). Gideon was powerful in battle (Judges 7).

A widow's son was brought back to life by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-37).

We, too, can experience victory through faith in Christ. Our victories over oppressors may be like those of the Old Testament saints, but more likely, our victories will be directly related to the role God wants us to play.

Even though our bodies deteriorate and die, we will live forever because of Christ. In the promised resurrection, even death will be defeated and Christ's victory will be made complete.

Three steps to finding victory over sin

1 John 3:8-9

But when people keep on sinning, it shows they belong to the Devil, who has been sinning since the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy these works of the Devil.

Those who have been born into God's family do not sin, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they have been born of God.

We all have areas where temptation is strong and habits are hard to conquer. These weaknesses give the devil a foothold, so we must deal with our areas of vulnerability.

If we are struggling with a particular sin, however, these verses are not directed at us, even if for the time we seem to keep on sinning. John is not talking about people whose victories are still incomplete; he is talking about people who make a practice of sinning and look for ways to justify it.

Three steps are necessary to find victory over prevailing sin:

- (1) Seek the power of the Holy Spirit and God's Word;
- (2) Stay away from tempting situations; and
- (3) Seek the help of the body of Christ—be open to their willingness to hold you accountable and to pray for you.

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin” means that true believers do not make a practice of sinning, nor do they become indifferent to God's moral law. All believers still sin, but they are working to gain victory over sin.

“God's seed remains in him” means that true believers do not make a practice of sinning because God's new life has been born into them.

We are “born of God” when the Holy Spirit lives in us and gives us Jesus' new life. Being born again is more than a fresh start; it is a rebirth, receiving a new family name based on Christ's death for us.

When this happens, God forgives us and totally accepts us; the Holy Spirit gives us new minds and hearts, lives in us, and begins helping us to become like Christ.

Our perspective changes too because we have a mind that is renewed day by day by the Holy Spirit

Romans 12:2

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.

Christians are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” with its behavior and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them.

Our refusal to conform to this world’s values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs—it must be firmly planted in our minds—“be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant.

Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed (see Romans 8:5).

Ephes. 4:22-24

So we must begin to think and act differently. See John 3:1-21 for more on being born again.

Our old way of life before we believed in Christ is completely in the past. We should put it behind us like old clothes to be thrown away. This is both a once-for-all decision when we decide to accept Christ's gift of salvation.

We are not to be driven by desire and impulse. We must put on the new role, head in the new direction, and have the new way of thinking that the Holy Spirit gives.

What it means to live victoriously.

Rev. 2:7

"Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

To overcome is to be victorious by believing in Christ, persevering, remaining faithful, and living as one who follows Christ. Such a life brings great rewards (Rev. 21:7).

Two trees were in the Garden of Eden—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:9). Eating from the tree of life brought eternal life with God; eating from the tree of knowledge brought realization of good and evil.

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, they disobeyed God's command. So they were excluded from Eden and barred from eating from the tree of life. Eventually, evil will be destroyed and believers will be brought into a restored paradise. In the new earth, everyone will eat from the tree of life and will live forever.

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