

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

DR. DAVID JEREMIAH

# OVERCOMER

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8 WAYS TO LIVE A LIFE OF UNSTOPPABLE STRENGTH,  
UNMOVABLE FAITH, AND UNBELIEVABLE POWER



**OVERCOMER**



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DR. DAVID JEREMIAH



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# PROLOGUE

It's hard out there. Sometimes it feels like the world is ripping apart at the seams. Sometimes it feels like your heart can't take any more hurt. But no matter what the world throws at you—anxiety, fear, confusion, temptation—you have a choice on how to respond.

You can concede defeat or live in the victory God promises you.

It's easy to say you choose victory, but are you ready to walk in it each day? Are you ready to win this fight against fear? Are you ready to overcome the world in practice and not just in theory?

In this book, I will show you how.

What would happen if you faced your challenges in the name of the Lord? What would life be like if your goal in every situation was to bring glory to His name? What would happen if you fully embraced God's strategy for victory?

If you did those things, you would be living as an Overcomer. And believe it or not, that's who you really are if you have placed your faith and hope in Christ: "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

This book teaches you God's strategy for overcoming the challenges you face. How do I know what that strategy is? Because when the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to list the spiritual armor we need to protect ourselves, he wrote:



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Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Eph. 6:10–18)

Based on these verses, we know Satan attacks us in at least eight different ways:

- Satan wants to keep you from God's strength.
- He's after your honesty.
- He's after your heart and your righteous life.
- He wants to fill you with anxiety.
- He wants to fill you with doubt.
- He longs to confuse your mind.
- He loves to tempt you to sin.
- He hates it when you pray.

In each chapter of this book you'll learn an overcoming strategy to defeat these attacks. You'll meet men and women in these pages who

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overcame their own adversity, so you can learn from and be inspired by their determination.

You'll also discover the path to victory over the trials you face in your own life. Yes, all of them: loss, disappointment, betrayal, abuse, injury, lies, addiction, self-doubt, mistakes, grief, anger, anxiety, regret. There's nothing Satan can throw at you that you cannot overcome.

But the time to prepare is now. I cannot stress that enough.

When Satan attacks, you won't have time to google "spiritual armor." You won't have time to phone a friend for advice on a counter-attack. You may not even have time to get down on your knees to pray.

You must be prepared.

In the first chapter, we'll focus on David, the Old Testament's greatest Overcomer. In the last chapter, I'll tell you the story of history's greatest Overcomer, the Lord Jesus Christ. And through the chapters in between, we'll discover eight strategies for overcoming the challenges we face in our lives:

- How to overcome weakness with strength
- How to overcome falsehood with truth
- How to overcome evil with good
- How to overcome anxiety with peace
- How to overcome fear with faith
- How to overcome confusion with wisdom
- How to overcome temptation with Scripture
- How to overcome everything with prayer

The journey of the Overcomer is a wonderful, profound, healing journey. God is all good, and He only gives good gifts—one after the other, again and again—to strengthen you for whatever the future holds. If you open your heart to receive those gifts, He will fill it to overflowing.

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Living the life of an Overcomer will bring you strength, peace, courage, hope, and joy such as you've never known.

It will also bring victory in your spiritual life. That's important, my friend, because victory is God's purpose for His children: "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14).

Join me on this journey to live a life of unstoppable strength, unmovable faith, and unbelievable power in the face of every challenge.

Join me and embrace your God-given destiny—for you are an Overcomer!

## CHAPTER 1

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# OVERCOMER

You'd have to search long and hard to find a more unlikely hero than Desmond Doss, the real-life subject of the 2016 film *Hacksaw Ridge*. And you'd be equally hard-pressed to find a better representative for the theme of this book: how to live as an Overcomer.

Born in Virginia in 1919 to working-class parents, Doss volunteered for the army during World War II. Due to his deep religious conviction that God had called him to never carry a weapon, he trained as a medic and was assigned to a rifle company.

Imagine refusing to carry a weapon yet being determined to go to war! Doss's convictions earned him ridicule, abuse, and contempt from his fellow soldiers and disdain from his superiors, but he never wavered. Terry Benedict, who filmed a documentary about Doss in 2004, said, "He just didn't fit into the Army's model of what a good soldier would be."

But all that changed in April 1945, when Doss's company fought the Battle of Okinawa, the bloodiest battle of the Pacific war. The key to winning Okinawa was gaining a Japanese stronghold atop a four-hundred-foot sheer cliff the Americans called Hacksaw Ridge.

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A bloody battle raged, but the Japanese held their ground. Finally, Doss's battalion was ordered to retreat.

But Doss could see American bodies strewn across the field, and he knew there were wounded among them. He stayed behind and, with machine gun and artillery fire bursting around him, ran repeatedly into the kill zone, carrying wounded GIs to the edge of the cliff and singlehandedly lowering them to safety in a makeshift rope gurney.

For twelve hours, he repeated this grueling task until he was sure no wounded American was left on the escarpment. By the time he finally left the ridge, Desmond Doss had saved the lives of seventy-five men!

Days later, the Americans took Hacksaw Ridge while Doss lay wounded in a base hospital. When his commanding officer brought him the precious charred and soggy Bible he'd lost in the initial assault, he was told every able man in the company—the same men who once ridiculed him for his faith—had insisted on searching for his Bible until it was found.

For his incredible feat, Doss was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Years later, he was asked how he found the strength to continue that night. His answer was simple. Each time he finished lowering another wounded man to safety down the cliff, he prayed, "Lord, just help me get one more."<sup>1</sup>

As Desmond Doss discovered, overcoming is a spiritual issue. But the idea of "overcoming" also has a military meaning: to conquer. As members of God's kingdom, we're called to conquer the barriers between who we are and who God wants us to be. Our goal is to "come over" from where we are today, and to flourish as the person God made us to be.

The obstacles we must overcome fall into three main categories: sin, the world, and the devil. Our own sinful nature is an obstacle; the temptations of the world are an obstacle; and the devil himself is an

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obstacle. Thankfully, in each case, God has equipped us to overcome every barrier in our path, as we'll discover starting in chapter 2.

In my estimation, David is the Old Testament's greatest Overcomer, and he is the poster child for the lessons we are about to learn. David fought a lot of battles during his life, but it's his first we all remember best—the day he defeated the giant Goliath.

In this first chapter of *Overcomer*, I invite you to take a fresh look at this well-known story. Listen to it as if you'd never heard it before, because I will use it to help you understand what it means to be an Overcomer. As you learn how David found the strength and courage to face down his giant, you'll discover how to overcome the challenges in your own life.

## THE OVERCOMER'S CHALLENGE

In Israel today, there's a place where a deep ravine lies between two tall hills. This is believed to be the site where the battle between David and Goliath occurred.

On one hill was the army of Israel. On the other was the army of the Philistines. Down in the valley between them was a plain about one hundred yards wide—the length of a modern football field.

In the middle of that plain, between these two armies, stood a huge man named Goliath. And from the side of the Israelites came a teenage boy named David.

The story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 is not just a story about a boy fighting a giant. It's the conflict of the ages. It's the story of the battle that's raged since Satan first rebelled against God. The story of good versus evil; the challenge to the living God by the devil and his forces.

But first, how did these two unlikely opponents get there?  
Let's start with Goliath.

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The Bible specifically calls Goliath the champion of the Philistines and tells us he came from Gath, a well-known Old Testament city. Gath is the place the spies referred to when they returned to Moses with an evil report about the promised land. It was in Gath, according to the unbelieving spies, that giants existed—giants so huge that next to them they felt like grasshoppers.

One scholar claims that the portrayal of Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 is the most detailed physical description of any man found in Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

### THE SIZE OF GOLIATH

“And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span” (1 Sam. 17:4).

During a time when the average man’s height was about five feet tall, the measurements of Goliath are astounding. He stood “six cubits and a span,” which means he was somewhere between nine foot six and nine foot nine.

That would make him at least two feet taller than the biggest players in professional basketball. And more than a foot taller than the tallest human alive today, Sultan Kösen, who measures eight feet three inches tall. But Goliath wasn’t just tall and skinny. He was a huge man who probably weighed between four and five hundred pounds.

### THE SIGHT OF GOLIATH

In his book *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*, author Malcolm Gladwell describes Goliath’s armor in detail:

To protect himself against blows to the body, he wore an elaborate tunic made up of hundreds of overlapping bronze fishlike scales. It covered his arms and reached to his knees and probably weighed more than a hundred pounds. He had bronze shin guards protecting

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his legs, with attached bronze plates covering his feet. He wore a heavy metal helmet. He had three separate weapons, all optimized for close combat. He held a thrusting javelin made entirely of bronze, which was capable of penetrating a shield or even armor. He had a sword on his hip. And as his primary option, he carried a special kind of short-range spear with a metal shaft as “thick as a weaver’s beam.” . . .

Can you see why no Israelite would come forward to fight Goliath?<sup>3</sup>

To make matters worse, Goliath did not offer a one-time threat. Oh no. He came twice a day for six weeks, standing in the valley and shouting out his challenge every morning and every night.

## THE SHOUT OF GOLIATH

Imagine this unnatural, huge beast of a man stomping to the middle of the plain in front of you and bellowing threats.

Then [Goliath] stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, “Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” And the Philistine said, “I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.” (vv. 8–10)

What does the voice of a man the size of Goliath sound like? A bellow to shake your soul, is what I imagine. A sound to strike terror into the hearts of the Israelites, as if his size hadn’t already done that. He roared loud enough to be heard on both sides of a plain the size of football field, demanding that one man, just one, come and face him in single combat.



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And not one man among the Israelites could bring himself to answer.

Single combat was a common practice in the ancient world. Rather than wipe out the enemy and lose all those potential servants, the Philistines preferred to settle their fights economically. Each side sent one man to fight, and those two men fought to the death. The winner's nation was declared victorious.

The loser's nation was enslaved, brutalized, and worse.

Who can blame the Israelites for not responding to Goliath's invitation? Their choice was certain death or certain slavery, and they all understood this. Who among us, doubting our skill and strength, lacking the power of the Lord, would want to be the man who faced that fate?

## THE OVERCOMER'S CHARACTER

It was going to take some kind of warrior to confront Goliath. No one in King Saul's army was prepared to accept the job. But then, here came David.

David was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons. Although he had been anointed by the prophet Samuel as the next king of Israel, his time to rule had not yet come and he was still home with his family. Meanwhile, his three older brothers had followed Saul to the battle.

One day Jesse told David to go and check on his brothers, and to take them and their captain provisions. A wise father, Jesse not only wanted to ensure his sons had food, but also that their captain viewed them favorably. And, like any concerned father, he wanted news of how they were doing: "See how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them" (v. 18).

When his father sent him on this errand, it must have been thrilling for the boy to run off and see the armies. But, as excited as he was,

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he did something significant before he left that morning. He tended to his responsibilities and made sure someone would be caring for the sheep (v. 20).

That's an important point, a small but telling character trait. Overcomers concentrate on details that go unnoticed by others. They do what needs to be done, even when no one is watching.

### THE CONVICTION OF DAVID

When David got to the camp, he dutifully found the supply master and gave him the supplies he'd brought. Then he ran to the army and greeted his brothers. As they were talking, Goliath strode out on the field below and shouted his challenge.

David seemed shocked that no one answered. He asked the men around him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel?" (v. 26). The soldiers answered that the king would give that man great riches, his daughter in marriage, and exempt his father's house from taxes.

That was quite an incentive.

While it was hard for David to understand why no one had taken up the call to defend Israel, it was even more appalling to David that Saul had not risen to the challenge himself. Saul stood head and shoulders above all his soldiers, and he was their king; he should have been the one to respond to Goliath's threat in the full power and strength of the Lord.

But Saul's relationship with God had deteriorated so much that he was operating in the flesh. He'd lost his ability to trust in the Living God.

*So David volunteered!*

### THE COURAGE OF DAVID

Before David declared he would fight Goliath, something happened that reveals the human side of overcoming—a side that hasn't

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changed since biblical times. When David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard him asking about the reward, he was furious.

"Why did you come down here?" Eliab demanded. "And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle" (v. 28).

David responded, "What have I done now? Is there not a cause?" (v. 29).

This was a brilliant answer. David both deflected Eliab's anger and brought the focus back to the matter at hand. "Don't be angry at me," he basically said. "Isn't there something more important for us to be thinking about?"

When a man or woman decides to be a champion for God, they set themselves up for a lot of heat and criticism. But like David, we can stand firm in our convictions when we are following the Lord and His calling.

## THE CONFIDENCE OF DAVID

Then David declared that he would fight Goliath. Imagine the response! There must have been derision, laughter, and disbelief slowly turning to consternation and anger. Or would there have been awe? Surely some of the soldiers felt dread—both for the terrible fate this boy would face and for themselves, with what seemed to be their inevitable fate finally at hand.

When Saul heard of it, he summoned David. At first he tried to talk the boy out of it, reminding David of his youth and inexperience, and that Goliath was an experienced and trained warrior—"a man of war from his youth" (v. 33).

But David was steadfast. He knew his power was in the Lord. His courage was truly a product of his faith in God. Without God, David was powerless against that giant; but with God, he could overcome the fiercest man alive.

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Unable to talk David out of the battle, Saul offered him his armor. But when David put it on, he couldn't walk. So, he took it all off. It was the king's own royal armor, surely the best in the whole army, but David knew he shouldn't wear it. If he couldn't walk, how could he fight?

## THE OVERCOMER'S CONQUEST

Let's stop here and note that the three terms describing Goliath are all physical: size, sight, and shout. But the three terms describing David are all spiritual: conviction, courage, and confidence.

This is a key observation as we witness what happens next.

### DAVID'S SLING

David headed for the plain. On the way, he stopped at a brook, gathered five smooth stones, and put them in his shepherd's pouch. With a sling in his hand, he approached Goliath.

It's worth taking a moment to understand the importance of the sling in biblical times:

Ancient armies had three kinds of warriors. The first was cavalry—armed men on horseback or in chariots. The second was infantry—foot soldiers wearing armor and carrying swords and shields. The third were projectile warriors, or what today would be called artillery: archers and, most important, slingers. Slingers had a leather pouch attached on two sides by a long strand of rope. They would put a rock or a lead ball into the pouch, swing it around in increasingly wider and faster circles, and then release one end of the rope, hurling the rock forward.

Slinging took an extraordinary amount of skill and practice. But in experienced hands, the sling was a devastating weapon. . . . In the Old Testament Book of Judges, slingers are described as being

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accurate within a “hair’s breadth.” An experienced slinger could kill or seriously injure a target at a distance of up to two hundred yards. . . . Imagine standing in front of a Major League Baseball pitcher as he aims a baseball at your head. That’s what facing a slinger was like—only what was being thrown was not a ball of cork and leather but a solid rock.<sup>4</sup>

### DAVID’S STRATEGY

When Goliath saw David, he was insulted, even outraged.

“Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” he said, and cursed David by his gods, probably using the name of Dagon, whom David knew to be a false god. This was an insult to the Living God of David.

Then Goliath goaded the boy even more. “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!” (vv. 43–44).

Imagine what Goliath must have thought. He’d been coming to that valley every day for six weeks, waiting for somebody brave enough to meet him in battle, and all he ever saw were Israel’s terrified soldiers. Then he saw a boy with no armor, no shield, and no sword.

Verse 42 says that Goliath “disdained” David, which literally means “he curled his lip.”

David replied:

You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands. (vv. 45–47)

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This was the moment of truth. David had just infuriated the biggest bully on the block, and if God wasn't who David said He was, David would be history. David purposely intimidated Goliath, and in doing so set himself up to win the battle.

### DAVID'S SHOT

At that, Goliath moved toward David. And that's when David ran *toward* the giant.

If you were watching from the hill, you'd have seen an enormous armed man start walking toward an apparently unarmed boy. Then you'd have seen something amazing: that boy running right toward the gigantic warrior!

This wasn't bravado. This was strategy. The giant wasn't going away, and David was determined to face him on his terms. So he ran to the point at which his sling's range was most effective. When he was where he wanted to be, he stopped running, quickly took a stone from his bag, and put it in the sling. Then, with years of experience and practice, he "slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth" (v. 49).

Eitan Hirsch, a ballistics expert with the Israeli Defense Forces, recently did a series of calculations showing that a typical-size stone hurled by an expert slinger at a distance of thirty-five meters would have hit Goliath's head with a velocity of thirty-four meters per second [roughly seventy-six miles per hour]—more than enough to penetrate his skull and render him unconscious or dead.<sup>5</sup>

Then David made good on his promise. He ran and stood over Goliath, took the giant's own sword, and cut off the man's head with it.

The next few moments must have been filled with the shocked response of both sides. The Israelites probably thought, *Did I see what*

*I thought I saw?* And the Philistines knew they were in a world of trouble!

As Overcomers, when we reflect on this famous story, there are five lessons to be learned. Let's look at them one by one, through the lens of this story, and through the stories of others who faced similar giants—and defeated them.

When you're facing challenges . . .

## REFUSE TO BE DISCOURAGED BY YOUR FRIENDS

Do you remember Eliab's reaction when he heard his youngest brother ask about Goliath? How many times has that happened to you? Have you ever determined to do something important, only to have your closest relatives or friends doubt you?

The sad fact is, we can't always count on those we look up to for support. In fact, sometimes all we can count on them doing is mocking or undermining us, instead of encouraging and standing behind us.

Whenever you want to do something great for God, get ready for your brothers and sisters to give you all the reasons why you'll fail. Often the criticism comes from those who don't have the courage to accept the challenge themselves. Their thinking seems to be that if they're not going to succeed, they don't want anyone else to either.

Be prepared for this challenge. Don't let the defensiveness, resentment, jealousy, or anger of others deflect you from your purpose. No matter how good your idea or goal is, don't expect others to immediately agree with your purpose or vision. You must be determined.

In the 1930s, Andrew Jackson Higgins ran a boat-building company in New Orleans. When America entered World War II, Higgins tried to convince the US Navy it needed a small landing craft with a flat bottom, high sides, and a front-opening portal to land troops in

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shallow waters that larger ships couldn't reach. But the navy had no interest.

At that point in the war, the focus was entirely on larger ships—battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and aircraft carriers. But Higgins was persistent. Finally, he convinced the navy brass of the need for such a craft, but they chose to design their own rather than give him the contract.

Higgins still refused to be discouraged. He prodded and nagged for two more years, until the navy reluctantly agreed to let him compete with their preferred contractors for the boat's design. Sure enough, Higgins's design was clearly superior. Finally, he was awarded the contract to build thousands of LCVs (the acronym for Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel).

But the story doesn't end there. It ends three years later, on the beaches of Normandy.

We've all seen films of LCVs being used as landing craft when allied troops crossed the English Channel and stormed the beaches of Normandy, ultimately liberating France and Western Europe from Nazi control. Those were Higgins's boats!

The Battle of Normandy would have been impossible without the shallow-draft boat. General Dwight D. Eisenhower said of Andrew Jackson Higgins, "He is the man who won the war for us."

Indeed, Higgins was an Overcomer.<sup>6</sup>

You may not realize it, but you know of so many others: Abraham Lincoln, raised poor and illiterate, was rebuffed by bankers, voters, employers, and law school deans before becoming president of the United States. Thomas Edison's teachers told him he was too dumb to learn anything—and he was fired from his first two jobs. Walt Disney was fired as a newspaper editor, with his boss saying he lacked imagination. Colonel Harland Sanders was told no 1,009 times by restaurant owners before he found one who'd try his now-famous fried chicken recipe.



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Get the idea? Sometimes the biggest obstacles we face in life are the people around us, the people we need to convince to support us, or the people of little vision who need us the most.

And that brings us to the next lesson . . .

## REINFORCE YOUR FOCUS ON GOD

Before he became the president of Child Evangelism Fellowship, Reese Kauffman was a successful manufacturer in Indianapolis. Some of the lessons he learned in business have helped him in every area of his life and ministry. One of those came in the shape of a canoe.

“One Friday afternoon I drove home in a state of depression,” he said. “I lost four major accounts that week, customers I had worked hard to develop. Losing just one of them would have been a blow, but to lose all four in one week! I could see my business crashing down.”

His wife, Linda, suggested he take the canoe out on the river awhile.

So I launched the canoe into the White River and started paddling upstream toward the bridge. As I paddled I talked to myself, asking myself questions and working through my emotions verbally.

Is God sovereign over my affairs? Yes. Does He love me? Yes, with a love beyond comprehension. Would God hurt me? No, He would never hurt me. He’s my heavenly Father who works everything for my good. If those things are true, what am I worried about? I don’t know.

As I thought through things from a heavenly or biblical perspective, the cloud lifted. My countenance changed and my joy returned. I turned the canoe around and returned to the house a different man. Later I realized the Lord was deleting some smaller accounts that weren’t very profitable anyway. He cleared them out of my agenda to make room for larger and better accounts that were

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coming. I also realized afresh that it grieves the Lord when we don't trust Him. He has never once failed us. I can't tell you how many times both in business and in ministry I've had to metaphorically get back into that canoe and remind myself that whenever I am fretting it's because I'm not thinking biblically or seeing clearly.<sup>7</sup>

Kauffman learned to get his eyes off the "giant" in his life and onto the God over his life, just like David.

Max Lucado notes that David made only two observations about Goliath:

One statement to Saul about Goliath (v. 36). And one to Goliath's face (v. 26, NIV). . . .

That's it. Two Goliath-related comments (and tacky ones at that) and no questions. No inquiries about Goliath's skill, age, social standing, or IQ. David asks nothing about the weight of the spear, the size of the shield. . . . David gives no thought to the diplomatic on the hill. Zilch.

But he gives much thought to God.<sup>8</sup>

Lucado goes on to list the nine times David referenced the Lord's strength: "God-thoughts outnumber Goliath-thoughts nine to two. How does this ratio compare with yours? Do you ponder God's grace four times as much as you ponder your guilt? Is your mental file of hope four times as thick as your mental file of dread? Are you four times as likely to describe the strength of God as you are the demands of your day?"<sup>9</sup>

It's all right to talk to God about your problems. But sometimes you need to talk to your problems about God. Preach the goodness of God to them. Prophesy the promises of God to them. Proclaim the victory of the cross to them.

Put your problems in perspective, and then . . .

## REFLECT ON YOUR PREVIOUS VICTORIES

As king, Saul could have refused to allow David to fight Goliath. After all, there was a lot at stake. To convince Saul, David recalled his previous victories—not to brag, but to establish the truth.

“Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” Moreover David said, “The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” (vv. 34–37)

David didn’t exclaim, “I can do it!” Instead, he noted that God had been on his side in the past, so he could trust God would be on his side in the present. He found courage in the Lord. His past victories gave him confidence in the power of God to win any challenge.

I like what I heard one time about testimonies: “If you have never had a test, you can never have a testimony.” There are many ways to gather strength from your past successes, and to let them support your spirit and your faith.

When Jim Jones was five years old, he was shuttled from his family home in Mississippi to northern Michigan to live with his grandparents. The trauma of the move caused him to stutter. Hating school because other kids snickered when he spoke, he learned to speak as little as possible, consoling himself by writing poetry.

When Jim was a teenager, a new teacher came to the school—Donald Crouch, a devout Mennonite retired professor who loved

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poetry. Crouch found out Jim also loved poetry and wrote it. He urged the boy to read it aloud. Jim just shook his head and turned away.

But in class one morning, Crouch tricked him. The boy had turned in a poem he'd written, and the teacher said, "I don't think you wrote this."

When Jim, stuttering, insisted he had, Crouch forced him to prove it by reading it to the class. With his knees shaking while the other kids smirked and whispered, Jim began to read.

He found, as many who stutter have discovered, that the rhythms of poetry enabled his words to flow naturally. That day, Jim did not stutter. He continued to practice reading poetry and learned he had an excellent, resonant voice. After he graduated, he got his college degree, served in the army, and returned to study drama on the GI Bill.

Today we know Jim as James Earl Jones, a superb actor famous for his acting talent and for his sonorous, inimitable voice. Who can forget him as Darth Vader's voice in the original Star Wars films?

But again, that's not the end of the story. Years later, at the pinnacle of his career, Jones was asked to record the New Testament. He remembered Donald Crouch—the man who had given him victory over his disability all those years ago—and dedicated the reading to him.

As Jones put it, Crouch "not only helped to guide me to the author of the Scriptures, but as the father of my resurrected voice, also helped me find abundant life."<sup>10</sup>

This is one of the main reasons to record God's blessings in a journal. After all, life moves on, and we can forget our own successes and triumphs, as well as those who aided us. When you write down what God has done for you in the past, you are preparing yourself to believe Him in the future!

With that confidence in His faithfulness, you can . . .

## RUN TOWARD YOUR PROBLEMS, NOT AWAY FROM THEM

In 2008, San Francisco architect Chris Downey experienced severe vision loss. Doctors discovered a tumor had wrapped itself around his optic nerve, requiring immediate surgery. When Chris awoke from anesthesia, his vision was blurry but at least he could see. Within days, however, everything went black. His eyesight was gone, and so was his job.

For most architects, going blind would be career-ending. But not for Chris Downey. Rather than allow his blindness to drive him from his calling, he faced it head-on. He found a blind computer scientist who'd developed a software program that printed blueprints on a tactile printer, letting him feel the lines on the paper.

After he learned to read blueprints through his fingertips, Chris's blindness gave him a unique way of visualizing spaces. As one architect explained it, Chris doesn't see the plans from above, as sighted people do. Instead, as he runs his fingers along the lines of a building's corridors, he visualizes the space as if he's walking through it. He's able to "see" obstacles and recommend efficiencies that sighted architects might overlook. Architectural firms hire Chris as a consultant to work on creating efficient designs that accommodate the blind.

Chris Downey didn't run away from his problem. Instead, he ran toward it with courage and creativity.<sup>11</sup>

Like Chris's problems, your problems probably don't go away by themselves. Instead, like Goliath challenging the Israelites, they keep showing up morning and evening, but often for a lot longer than forty days.

Whatever they are—family problems, workplace problems, financial problems—when you can't figure out the answers you may worry, get anxious, or lose sleep. For me, there are two times of day when problems are the most worrying: first thing in the morning and last thing at night.

That was the situation the Israelites faced. They were confronted morning and night with a challenge for which they had no answer. And

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how did David respond? “So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine” (v. 48).

So how do you overcome your problems? The story of David tells you how: Run toward your problems, embrace them, or confront them! Don’t postpone them, ignore them, or try to work around them. Instead, face them head-on and deal with them!

Finally, as you are running toward your problem, be sure to . . .

## REMEMBER FOR WHOM YOU ARE FIGHTING

In the autumn of 1964, Washington, DC, socialite Mary Pinchot Meyer was murdered execution-style along the canal where she walked daily. The police found Ray Crump Jr., a black day-laborer, nearby and arrested him for the murder. Two eyewitnesses claimed to have seen Crump standing over the victim’s body. They described him as a black man, at least five foot eight and weighing about 185 pounds.

Washington defense attorneys shied away from the case, but Dovey Johnson Roundtree took it for a fee of one dollar. In court, federal prosecutors presented a tower of circumstantial evidence, including twenty-seven witnesses and more than fifty exhibits, to argue that Crump committed the murder.

But defense attorney Roundtree conducted her own extensive investigation and found major discrepancies in the prosecution’s case. In the end, she presented only three witnesses and one exhibit. The exhibit was Crump himself, a frail, thin man barely five feet three inches tall. After only a twenty-minute summation, Roundtree won the case.

Why did Dovey Roundtree take such a high-profile, supposedly unwinnable case for which she received no compensation? The answer is that she knew she was taking on a cause larger than her client and even larger than herself.

Roundtree was the first black member of the Women’s Bar

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Association of the District of Columbia and a committed Christian. Throughout her lifetime, Roundtree took on cases that seemed hopeless because she believed in justice and knew for whom she was fighting: the God of justice.<sup>12</sup>

Do you know that in every situation you, too, can find the strength you need by remembering for whom you are fighting? David did. Listen to his words to Goliath: “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts. . . . All this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands” (verses 45, 47).

What a difference it would make if we faced our challenges like David did. If we said, “Lord, for Your honor and glory, I’m going to do the right thing. I’m going to honor You and face my battles in the power of Your name.”

In the next chapters, you’ll find the strategy of the Overcomer explained and the path of the Overcomer laid out before you. You’ll discover what happens when you remember for whom you are fighting.

But it will be up to you to follow it or not. Here is something that might help.

While change can be hard, new habits are most easily acquired when there’s a great reward waiting for you. Well, I promise you there is no greater reward than the one that waits for you on the other side of this journey: “He who overcomes shall inherit all things” (Rev. 21:7).

You are called to be an Overcomer. You are called to walk in victory, strength, peace, and love. Come walk the path Paul laid out for you in the pages that follow.

It’s time to begin your new life as an Overcomer!

*For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*

—1 JOHN 5:4, NIV

## CHAPTER 2

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# OVERCOMING WEAKNESS WITH STRENGTH

Canadian speed skater Denny Morrison won his first Olympic medal in 2006 and continued winning medals right through the 2014 Winter Olympics. After that, his eyes were firmly set on the 2018 Games in South Korea. But in May 2015, Morrison was in a horrific motorcycle accident and barely survived multiple serious injuries, including one that left him with a titanium rod in his leg.

As soon as possible, he began the arduous process of rehabilitation and training, still determined to qualify for the 2018 Olympics. But the next year, after he and his girlfriend, Josie Spence, completed a three-week bike trip, Spence noticed suspicious behavior in Morrison: slurred speech, droopy face, left-side weakness, and a left-foot flip-flop that kept falling off. Spence knew the signs. She rushed Morrison to a hospital where he was diagnosed as having had a stroke.

Again, Morrison recovered and dove back into training, now also struggling with the mental aftereffects of the stroke, including



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depression. Remarkably, in 2017, he and Spence, also a Canadian speed skater, both qualified to represent Canada at the 2018 Winter Olympics.

Training for that level of competition pushes athletes to their limits, but Morrison's teammates repeatedly said he was their inspiration to keep going no matter what. His coach called him the most resilient person he'd seen. And, although Morrison didn't medal in 2018, his journey to get there was a victory in itself.

Describing his "grit" and determination, Morrison said, "It's human nature to encounter adversity and, when you do, there's a choice you have to make: Are you going to fight? Are you going to overcome and work toward your goals? Or are you going to give up and fail?"

"When things stand in the way between you and what you want to achieve, it's that grit factor that gets you where you want to go. Goals don't come easy for anyone, no matter the line of work. But I think if you make a gritty attempt and push forward, you'll surprise yourself and everyone else with how far you can go."<sup>1</sup>

## THE OVERCOMER'S STRENGTH

As Denny Morrison learned, strength comes in many forms. So does weakness. There's marital and moral weakness, financial and physical weakness, parental and job-related weakness. But the most debilitating weakness of all is weakness in your spiritual life—in your walk with God.

Suffering, challenges, and hardships are universal. At some point, we all face something that shakes us to the core. The cause can be external, such as injury, loss, or mistreatment by others. It can be internal, such as self-doubt, poor choices, inflated pride, or addictions. In our core passage in Ephesians, we're told to face all realities of an oppositional world with the strength we receive from our spiritual life.

## OVERCOMING WEAKNESS WITH STRENGTH

As Paul was making his final appeal to the Ephesians, he wrote: “Finally, my brethren, be *strong* in the Lord and in the *power* of His *might*” (Eph. 6:10, emphasis added). In the Phillips translation we read, “be strong—not in yourselves but in the Lord, in the power of his boundless resource.”

Paul’s command to be strong echoes others throughout the Bible.

- When God commissioned Joshua as Moses’s successor to lead the nation of Israel, He commanded him on three different occasions to “be strong and of good courage” (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9).
- David said to his son Solomon, “Be strong and of good courage, and do it; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God—my God—will be with you” (1 Chron. 28:20).
- Paul prepared Timothy for his new pastoral role with this counsel: “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1).

In Scripture we see example after example of God coming alongside people who felt weak and inadequate—who felt the absence of the strength needed for the assignment they’d been given—and calling them to be strong. In fact, there are more than thirty occasions in the Bible where God *commands* someone to be strong.

When you read Paul’s motivational words to the Ephesians, you might logically assume the command is to be strong in order to fight. After all, this passage describes how to equip yourself as a soldier, and fighting is what soldiers do. But read the passage more carefully and you discover that this is not a call to fight at all.

It is a call to *stand*.

Four times in Ephesians 6 the apostle Paul uses the language of standing to describe how to apply spiritual strength (vv. 11, 13, 14). Next to these verses in my Bible I’ve written: STRONG TO STAND.

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Why aren't we commanded to fight? Because Christ, by His death and resurrection, has already defeated Satan. That's why we read verses in the Bible such as:

- "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37),
- "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57), and
- "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14).

From the spiritual perspective, we're not fighting *for* victory, but *from* victory, and this changes everything. We're called to be strong so we'll stand in the victory that's already been won. As we look back, we rest in Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. As we look forward, we face the future knowing God will always lead us in victory. This is what it means to be an Overcomer!

This is how Paul put it to the Corinthians: "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

## STANDING STRONG

In the film version of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, actor Ian McKellen plays the role of the timeless wizard Gandalf the Grey. As he and the other members of the Fellowship of the Ring flee from Orcs through the Mines of Moria, beneath Mount Caradhras, they're pursued by a terrible and ancient monster called a Balrog. In the mines, they come to a deep chasm over which stretches a thin, stone bridge. Gandalf shoos the others across the bridge to safety and, standing in the middle of the bridge, turns to face his foe.

The Balrog is a demonic creature, a living manifestation of fire.

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Fire erupts from his throat, fire emanates from his body, and fiery lashes whip back and forth around him. As the Balrog makes every attempt to destroy the wizard, Gandalf plants his feet on the stone bridge, faces the monster, raises his arms—staff in one hand, sword in the other—and bellows, “You shall not pass!”

You no doubt know how the story continues from there—and if you don’t, I won’t spoil the surprise. But here’s my point: Gandalf the Grey fought by standing, not by swinging his sword or his staff. This is what Paul is telling you, that you are called by God to fight by standing firm, to take a stand so that evil shall not pass. Through your faith, He gives you the courage and strength to do this.

But what if your faith is weak? What if self-doubt, pain, or limiting beliefs are so loud in your head and heart they’re all you hear?

I understand. Let’s face it, we all look at Gandalf, and say, “Well, it was easy for him. That’s who he was.” And it’s true, Gandalf was as well-equipped for this battle as possible. Also, his enemy was unmistakable—nobody would look at a Balrog and wonder if it was an enemy or not!

Our journey is different. We don’t always have a clear purpose or destination. Our enemies are often well-disguised. And we don’t live in a fictional place called Middle Earth, surrounded by beings with superhuman strength and ability.

Or do we?

I believe our world is very much a kind of “middle earth”—midway between Creation and Re-creation. We all face great challenges. The evil one flings “fiery darts” at us daily, to knock us off balance, or over the precipice. He does everything in his tremendous power to prevent us from achieving our eternal destination.

Each day you must ask yourself, as you lean on the strength of God: “Am I going to overcome and work toward my goals? Or am I going to give up and fail?”

Every morning, as your brain pulls itself from sleep and into the

waking world, you make decisions. How will you start your day? How will you speak to and treat your spouse, your child, your colleague, the stranger next to you? Will you take steps to care for yourself, or will you give in to the rush of life and neglect your own needs?

And when you're attacked in a way that exposes your weakness, what will you do? Will you fight? (Satan is stronger than you.) Will you run? (He is faster than you.) Will you try to endure? (He is more patient than you.)

Or will you *stand*?

I urge you to take Paul's words and defend the ground of your life by standing firm. Fight by standing in the victory that is already yours in Jesus Christ. That's the only thing you have that your enemy doesn't have; it's the only thing for which he has no defense. Simply stand in the full power of God's strength through Jesus Christ.

## FINDING THE STRENGTH YOU NEED

I've always been a high-energy person. When I was a boy my mother often said, "David Paul, where do you get all that energy?"—not in admiration, but in frustrated exhaustion.

In high school, I sang in the choir, played in the band, played baseball and basketball, and ran track. I went to college on a basketball scholarship, carried a full class load, and worked at two different radio stations during my junior and senior years.

While attending seminary in Dallas, I worked as a dockhand. Every weekend my wife, Donna, and I drove to Fort Worth to serve as interns at the Northwest Bible Church. Somehow, I managed to play basketball in an industrial league in my spare time.

After seminary, we moved to Haddon Heights, New Jersey, and served the youth of the Baptist church in a frenetic seven-day-a-week commitment. Two years later we followed the direction of the Lord

## OVERCOMING WEAKNESS WITH STRENGTH

to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where alongside seven families we planted the Blackhawk Baptist Church. Ask anyone who's started a church, and they'll probably tell you it's the hardest thing they've ever done. Donna and I would agree.

In 1981, I accepted the call to San Diego to take the reins of the church pastored by Dr. Tim LaHaye. But it wasn't just a church. It was also a primary and secondary school system. It was one church in three locations, and at that time serious plans were underway for a retirement center. I was involved in all of it, attending board and staff meetings and preaching five times every weekend. I always seemed to have the energy I needed for each assignment. I don't remember feeling tired because I never needed much sleep.

But on September 26, 1994, everything changed. I was diagnosed with stage four lymphoma and immediately went into a protocol of chemical treatment.

What I remember most was the weakness and profound fatigue the medicines inflicted on my system. No matter how much I slept, by 9:00 A.M. I wanted to go back to bed. I went from being a high-energy guy who never stopped, to being constantly fatigued, confused, and yes, frightened by this weakened state in which I found myself. Never before had I understood what it felt like to be weak.

On the first Sunday after completing the stem cell therapy that God used to cure me of cancer, I struggled to prepare myself to address our congregation for the first time in eight weeks. I was doing okay until our choir began singing the song "Total Praise," by Richard Smallwood. It wasn't the first time I'd heard that song, but on this day it affected me deeply. The words, which praise God for His strength, grabbed hold of my heart.

As I sat there on the front row, I began to cry. I knew God was the One who had strengthened me in my recovery from cancer. Almighty God was the source of my strength. He was the strength of my life.

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This is the truth of Scripture. Our God is an awesome God—a God of ultimate strength.

- “The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!” (Ps. 68:35).
- “Trust in the LORD forever, for in . . . the LORD is everlasting strength” (Isa. 26:4).

If God is your strength, and yet within you there is weakness, what do you do? Just believing what the Bible says about the might and power of God doesn’t overcome weakness. The apostle James reminds us that “even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19).

The great truth is this: You don’t have to beg God for strength, and you don’t have to look for strength. God is looking to give His strength to those who need it and will receive it!

So how do we overcome our weakness with His strength?

Let me tell you the incredible truth I have learned: God has promised to *give* us His strength!

- “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. *He gives power to the weak*, and to those who have no might He increases strength” (Isa. 40:28–29, emphasis added).
- “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. *I will strengthen you*, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10, emphasis added).

If you translate these promises from the Old Testament into the language of the New Testament, you hear the apostle Paul exalting, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

God has all the strength you'll ever need. And God desires to make His strength available to you. But how do you access that strength? How do you download God's strength into your life?

## WE DOWNLOAD GOD'S STRENGTH FROM HIS WORD

Biblical scholar R. A. Torrey was once approached by a man who complained he got nothing out of Bible study. "Read it," Torrey said.

The man replied, "I do read it."

"Read it some more," said the man of God. "Take one book and read it twelve times a day for a month." He suggested the discouraged Christian start with 2 Peter because it contains only three chapters.

Later, the man said, "My wife and I read 2 Peter three or four times in the morning, two or three times at noon, and two or three times at dinner. Soon I was talking 2 Peter to everyone I met. It seemed as though the stars in the heavens were singing the story of 2 Peter. I read 2 Peter on my knees, marking passages with my colored pencils. Teardrops mingled with the colors, and I said to my wife, 'See how I have ruined this part of my Bible.'"

And his wife simply reminded him that as the pages of his Bible had gotten darker, his life had become lighter.<sup>2</sup>

That reminds me of something I heard years ago: "If your Bible is falling apart, it usually means that you are not."

The psalmist wrote, "My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word" (Ps. 119:28). But how do we open our hearts for God to do this?

Think of it this way: Your computer's hard drive contains all the applications you use for word processing, accounting, graphics, and more. When you launch one of those programs, the content of that application is "downloaded" from the hard drive into temporary



memory where your computer's operating system finds it and delivers it to your computer's screen. Until that program is called on, it sits unused on the hard drive.

In other words, the program is just data waiting to solve a problem. You have to call on that data and apply it.

In a similar way, God's Word is filled with "great and precious promises" that "pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3–4). All the strength we need for the challenges of life is found in the Bible. A Bible sitting on a shelf is full of strength-giving truth, but that truth changes nothing until it's moved from the shelf into your heart and mind.

We access the power of God by reading, memorizing, listening to, meditating on, and obeying the Bible. Like loving words from an encouraging friend, the words you find in the pages of Scripture will strengthen your soul with wisdom, joy, and light (Ps. 19:7–8). They'll impart the certainty of God's Word to give you strength.

On November 19, 2007, Pauline Jacobi loaded her groceries into her car in the Walmart parking lot in Dyersburg, Tennessee. Then she got in the driver's seat to head home. Suddenly, a man jumped into the front seat beside her.

"I have a gun and I'll shoot if you don't give me money," he said.

The ninety-two-year-old Jacobi refused the demand three times before saying, "If you kill me, I'll go to heaven and you'll go to hell. Jesus is in this car, and he goes with me everywhere I go."

Tears welled in the man's eyes, and for the next ten minutes Jacobi ministered to him about faith, God, and eternity. Finally, he told her he would go home and pray. Jacobi responded that he could pray any time he wanted; God would hear him.

Then she reached into her purse and gave him all the money she had left—ten dollars. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he took the money and left, but not before leaning across the seat and kissing Jacobi on the cheek.<sup>3</sup>

What gave Pauline Jacobi the strength to verbally stand up to

this man? It was the strength of her spiritual life, the strength of her love for Christ, and her confidence in His Word. And that strength was reinforced by her habit of reading the Bible every day, downloading the Word of God into her heart and mind. What a remarkable Overcomer!

### WE DOWNLOAD GOD'S STRENGTH FROM WORSHIP

When your heart is caught up in the worship of God, something happens to you inwardly. Worship fills your heart with the worthiness of God and uplifts your spirit. That's why the Bible is filled with verses like these:

- “Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power” (Ps. 21:13).
- “To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; for God is my defense, my God of mercy” (Ps. 59:17).

One of my favorite Old Testament passages is from the book of Habakkuk. This book opens to us the heart of a prophet agonizing over God's inattention to his prayers. Habakkuk was watching his nation, Israel, fall into sin and rebellion. He couldn't understand why God didn't judge this nation, why God didn't even respond to his prayers. And then one day God answered Habakkuk and told him He planned to use the Chaldeans as the rod of judgment against the people of Israel.

At that time, the Chaldeans were the most wicked nation on the face of the earth. And yet God was going to use *them* to judge His chosen people?

The prophet Habakkuk was overwhelmed. Why would God do

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such a thing? It went against everything he'd come to know and love about God. When you read this short book, you feel the agonizing pain of the imponderable situation in which Habakkuk found himself.

The first words of the third and final chapter of Habakkuk read as follows: "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth." While the exact meaning of *shigionoth* is not known, it is generally believed to be some sort of musical instruction. Hold that thought and look at the last words in the book: "To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments." Those two musical inscriptions tell us that everything written between them is a song. And it's one of the most profound worship songs in the entire Bible, concluding with these haunting lines:

Though the fig tree may not blossom,  
Nor fruit be on the vines;  
Though the labor of the olive may fail,  
And the fields yield no food;  
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,  
And there be no herd in the stalls—  
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The LORD God is my strength;  
He will make my feet like deer's feet,  
And He will make me walk on my high hills.

—HABAKKUK 3:17–19

In the end, Habakkuk had to come to terms with this question: Will I trust in the wisdom and goodness of God no matter what happens around me?

Instead of looking back or looking around, Habakkuk decided to look up. And his conclusion became this amazing hymn of praise.

## OVERCOMING WEAKNESS WITH STRENGTH

How do we follow Habakkuk's example? We worship the Lord. We simply love, adore, and praise God's name—no matter what's going on around us. We know He will march with us to the farthest corners of the earth and to the end of the age.

As we worship, our life comes together in unexpected ways. And as we face challenges head-on, we keep praising and worshiping the God who is greater and stronger than any challenge in our path. We overcome our weakness with strength downloaded through worship.

## WE DOWNLOAD GOD'S STRENGTH BY WAITING

We might not like the act of waiting, but the Bible says when we wait on the Lord, we will find the strength we need:

- “Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!” (Ps. 27:14).
- “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength” (Isa. 40:30–31).

The essence of waiting is to accept the unfolding of God's plan in His time. We're preparing ourselves to hear His still small voice when He knows we're ready. But waiting is the opposite of what our fast-paced world has taught us.

So—how do we wait on God?

## SLOW DOWN

Take a moment and consider how the frantic pace of our lives affects the peace of our souls. The Bible, by precept and personal

illustration, points us in a different direction. To download strength from God we need to make time to be with Him. We need to slow down, get quiet, and pray.

Isaiah said, “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isa. 30:15).

Isaiah’s word for “quiet” means ceasing activity, rather than the cessation of noise. This is the message of Isaiah 30—God wanted His people to stop their frantic activity by which they were trying to solve their own problems. The whole chapter is filled with the people’s striving, running here and there trying to get help, and building alliances with pagan neighbors. You can feel the stress and tension escalating as you read the chapter.

As our challenges mount, our fatal tendency is to exert more strength and get busier. But God says the way we gain strength is by retreating into the quietness of His presence and waiting upon Him.

I’ve tried it both ways. Sometimes I’ve tried to run to every colleague, read every book, recruit every ally—and I end up more stressed than when I started.

Other times I’ve gone to God at the outset and said, “Lord, these things are too much for me. I don’t know what to do or how to handle them, and I’m simply coming to You. You’re the God of my life. Calm my soul and strengthen me for what lies ahead.” And that is when peace and strength have come.

## GET QUIET

We’re deluged daily with noise, distractions, technology, and the clamor of our culture. Sometimes in airports I’d like to sit quietly and read, but television monitors blare the news. In doctors’ offices we have to put up with game shows shouting from the wall. In large cities the sounds of jackhammers, car horns, and sirens are unending. At home our televisions, laptops, tablets, and smartphones are constantly playing, beeping, and pinging alerts at us.

## OVERCOMING WEAKNESS WITH STRENGTH

All the noise increases tension. The *Washington Post* recently carried the story of a bluebird that built her nest seventy-five yards from a loud natural gas compressor. As the weeks passed, her stress hormone levels became skewed and her health deteriorated. Her body simply broke down, and her hatchlings couldn't survive. When scientists later sampled her blood, they found the same physiological symptoms as those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>4</sup>

The article went on to describe the debilitating effects of noise pollution on the natural environment around us. It's creating enormous stress on wildlife. And on us. Our world is blanketed by so much noise—loud, harsh, and unsettling—that our souls are chronically stressed.

If you want to strengthen your soul by attuning yourself to the voice of God through His Word and in prayer, learn to get quiet. In his time of greatest weakness, the prophet Elijah looked for God in the midst of a powerful wind, a great earthquake, and a flaming fire. But God's voice was not heard in any of those dramatic displays. It was only after the fireworks were over and the world got quiet that Elijah heard God's "still small voice"—the voice that gave him the strength and courage he needed (1 Kings 19:12).

In his book on leadership, Ken Blanchard says, "Solitude and silence give us some space to reform our innermost attitudes toward people and events. They take the world off our shoulders for a time and interrupt our habit of constantly managing things, of being in control, or thinking we are in control."<sup>5</sup>

### PRAY

Prayer is a river through which God's strength flows into your life. Perhaps you're weak because you haven't slowed down enough to get quiet before the Lord and ask Him to strengthen your heart and soul. Here's a simple starting point in discovering the gifts of quietness and prayer: take the "Be Still" challenge.

Every day this month, find ten minutes during which you can sit

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quietly, read God's Word, and silently reflect on what He tells you in Scripture. Find the quietest spot you know and get into a comfortable position. Spend a minute or so inhaling and exhaling deeply, getting God's oxygen to the bottom of your lungs.

Make sure you've closed your laptop and silenced your phone and put it away. (While you can read the Bible from your phone, it's better to have a printed copy for this exercise.) Begin reading in Psalms, John, Philippians, or wherever you'd like, and read just a few verses. Read them aloud if you want. It's also helpful to underline any phrase that especially speaks to you.

End your quiet time with a simple prayer. If you're not sure how to ask God for strength, consider making David's prayers your own:

- "Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled" (Ps. 6:2).
- "But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!" (Ps. 22:19).

When you leave your quiet place, you'll be amazed at how much better you handle your day. Over time, your ten minutes may grow to twenty or thirty minutes, for you will soon find that your soul craves silence. It's the holy hush that lets you hear the still, small voice of God.

Slow down. Take time to wait. Find time to be alone. No noise. No phones. No people. And as you pray, let God wash away the stress and strain of each day.

## WE DOWNLOAD GOD'S STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

When the apostle Paul called out for God to remove his affliction, God answered him, saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My

strength is made perfect in weakness.” This assurance enabled Paul to declare, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

At first glance, Paul’s declaration seems to be a contradiction. How can weakness make one strong? But Paul understood how difficult circumstances in his life taught him a profound truth about God’s method for strengthening His children.

Years ago, a TV commercial advertised a glue with the claim that when it repaired a broken object, the point of the repair would be stronger than any other part of the object. Under stress, it would break anywhere else before breaking the bond of the glue. That’s what God did for Paul. He filled Paul’s broken place with His own strength, so that Paul was stronger in his weak place than anywhere else.

“God does not need your strength,” said Charles Spurgeon. “He has more than enough power of His own. He asks for your weakness: He has none of that Himself, and He is longing, therefore, to take your weakness, and use it as the instrument in His own mighty hand. Will you not yield your weakness to Him, and receive His strength?”<sup>6</sup>

At the end of his life, in a Roman prison and abandoned by his friends, the great apostle Paul could still say with confidence, “But the Lord stood with me and *strengthened* me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear” (2 Tim. 4:17, emphasis added).

“It is when believers are out of answers, confidence, and strength, with nowhere else to turn but to God that they are in a position to be most effective,” says John MacArthur. “No one in the kingdom of God is too weak to experience God’s power, but many are too confident in their own strength. Physical suffering, mental anguish, disappointment, unfulfillment, and failure squeeze the impurities out of believers’ lives, making them pure channels through which God’s power can flow.”<sup>7</sup>



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Because Paul knew firsthand that God's strength is revealed in weakness, he realized that it was especially at the cross of Christ that His power was demonstrated in its fullest. There, in the most humiliating of all forms of execution, Paul discovered the surpassing power of God. "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23–24).

At the cross Christ identified with us in our sin—meaning, He identified with us in our weakness. It's our sin that makes us weak and vulnerable to eternal death. But as Paul wrote, "For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4).

We who have received the benefit of that "weakness" Christ demonstrated on the cross know the power that resulted from it! By God's power Christ was raised up again, enabling us to live by the power of His resurrection. Our lives have been transformed! We have been set free from our sin!

This is the great strength Overcomers find in weakness.

## TURN YOUR WEAKNESS INTO HIS STRENGTH

For a concert violinist, strength is four finely tuned strings; the absence of a string would put most violinists in a position of weakness. But Israeli-American violinist Itzhak Perlman is not most violinists. And Perlman knows something about weakness to begin with. Afflicted with polio as a child, he wears braces on both legs and walks with the help of crutches. Getting on stage and seated for a concert is no small matter.

## OVERCOMING WEAKNESS WITH STRENGTH

One evening in 1995, while performing with an orchestra in New York City, one of the strings on his violin broke and hung limp off the side of the instrument. The loud *Snap!* ricocheted through the hall; it was obvious to everyone what had just happened. The audience, as well as the conductor and orchestra, assumed they would pause the concert while Perlman repaired, or replaced, his instrument.

Instead, the great violinist closed his eyes for a moment while the audience waited in silence, then motioned to the conductor to begin the piece again. What would be impossible for all but a few human beings—playing a violin concert with four good strings—was translated into something perhaps no one else could have done: play the same concert with only three strings. As he played, in his mind Perlman was adjusting, recomposing, innovating, and performing on the fly, turning a position of weakness into a performance of strength.<sup>8</sup>

Itzhak Perlman's lifetime of familiarity with the violin allowed him to turn a moment of defeat into a masterful victory. Your goal is to develop the resources you need to adjust, recompose, innovate, and prevail when confronted with your own challenges. For the Christian, that means knowing the source of strength that allows that to happen.

As an Overcomer, your strength is in God, not yourself. Stopping the “concert” of your life is not an option when you feel weak or overwhelmed. But if you diligently open your heart to the Lord and ask for His strength, He will fill you with it! And in that way, through your faith, the Lord will use your weakness to make you strong.

*Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen  
your heart, all you who hope in the LORD.*

—PSALM 31:24



## CHAPTER 3

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# OVERCOMING FALSEHOOD WITH TRUTH

Saturday, June 24, 1899, was a slow news day in Denver, Colorado. Four reporters from the four Denver newspapers were hanging about the Denver railroad station hoping to catch site of an incoming celebrity or hear some other gossip they could turn into a story for the Sunday edition of their papers. No such luck. They all retreated to the Oxford Hotel to commiserate over their problem in the hotel bar.

Then one of the reporters, Al Stevens, had a “Eureka!” moment. He would just invent a story and turn it in for publication as factual. The other reporters sensed a possibility, but they sensed it would have to be a foreign story that couldn’t be easily verified. So they agreed: “A group of American engineers stopped over in Denver last night en route to China to submit a bid on tearing down the Great Wall!”

Another reporter from the group asked, “Why would China want to tear down their most famous national monument?” A few ideas and theories later, they all agreed: “They were doing it as an act of international goodwill—to signify a new openness to the world, and

to invite new waves of foreign trade.” According to their fake story, the Great Wall would be replaced by a 1,500-mile highway into the heartland of China.

Brilliant! All four reporters wrote up their version of the story and submitted it to their respective papers.

So the news story was told—or the hoax masquerading as a news story was told. All four Denver papers printed the story, which reportedly made its way even to Europe and China. People around the world believed the United States was sending an envoy to dismantle the Great Wall of China.<sup>1</sup>

## A WORLD OF LIES

Perhaps no other temptation—or tempter—is as easy to embrace as a simple lie. What harm can it do? After all, it’s just words. . . .

And that’s where the slippery slope begins.

We see it all around us: telephone and email scammers, serial cheaters, dishonest coworkers or bosses, men who use women and vice versa, bullies and social media trolls, even family members who take advantage of our love and generosity.

Jesus said of Satan, “He . . . does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44).

If you have an email account, you’ve probably received emails from a “Nigerian prince” seeking your assistance in a large financial transaction that will result in you receiving a fee of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Or perhaps you’ve received mail from a “high-ranking official” in the United States government informing you that you’re owed a large sum of money. Or an email from a well-known billionaire who selected you to receive a generous one-time gift from his foundation.

Sound familiar? In each of these instances, all that’s required to

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receive your financial windfall is for you to confirm your contact information and send in a “processing” or “transaction” fee.

Like countless other ways trusting people can be taken advantage of, these “advance fee scams”—the promise of sending a small amount of money to receive a larger amount in return—have been documented for hundreds of years. And they show no signs of stopping. Our task is to do our best to separate truth from fiction, and for that, we have to know what truth looks like.

But before we look outside ourselves for the perpetrators, let’s examine our own hearts.

In their book *Freakonomics*, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner tell the story of an IRS officer named John Szilagyi. In the early 1980s, Szilagyi had completed enough random audits of other people’s tax returns to know that many US citizens were inflating the number of their dependents so they’d receive a bigger refund at the end of the year.

Szilagyi decided that something needed to be done, and his solution was to require taxpayers to list their children’s Social Security numbers. “Initially, there was a lot of resistance to the idea,” said Szilagyi. “The answer I got was that it was too much like 1984.”

A few years later, however, Szilagyi’s idea was revisited and passed into law for 1986. When the following year’s tax returns came trickling in, he and the rest of the IRS were astounded: seven million dependents had suddenly disappeared!<sup>2</sup>

Most of those who took advantage of the easy exemption for dependents probably didn’t consider themselves liars. Or cheats. But that doesn’t change the truth or the facts. No matter how much you dislike the IRS, or anyone you choose to deceive, a lie is still a lie.

It’s easy to assume that a lie is a foreign thing to us—something that invades our lives, homes, and relationships from the outside. But be careful you don’t make excuses for yourself that you wouldn’t make for others. Make time to take inventory of your own actions

and choices. Doing so will be a lesson in humility and the first step to understanding how you can be deceived by the emperor of lies.

## THE BELT OF TRUTH

In our core passage from Ephesians 6, Paul's first instruction is to "stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth" (v. 14). It may seem strange that the belt or girdle is the first item of the Roman soldier's equipment that Paul mentions, since it wasn't a piece of armor at all. But the belt had a central function that was vital to most of the soldier's armor and weapons.

The soldier's basic attire was a tunic—a shirt-like garment that draped from shoulder to knee. Over this he wore metal torso armor and long, protective leather strips that hung from his waist to his lower thighs around his entire body. His belt was a band of wide, thick leather with loops and slots that clamped over these items. From it hung a sword, rope, ration sack, money sack, and darts. Everything the soldier needed in hand-to-hand combat was on his belt, right there at his fingertips.

When running, the soldier pulled up his tunic and tucked it in his belt, freeing his legs for speed and maneuverability. This was known as "girding one's loins."

While the belt had no offensive function of its own, it was the piece of equipment that essentially held everything else together, keeping the soldier ready for anything he might face.

Here's what this means for us today: truth is what fits us for the life of a Christian. Truth holds everything together and makes us ready. At the center of our lives we place "the truth [that] is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). And everything we do is drawn from that all-encompassing center.

When we know the truth and live the truth, we can access our weapons quickly and confidently, without fear that anything is out of

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place in our lives. “We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2). Truth gives us courage to stand against our enemy.

Why is truth to be our primary concern? Because the weapons of Satan’s major attacks against believers are falsehood and deception. He is the great deceiver! This is how the Bible describes the devil: “When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

When we stand in the truth, we never speak from our own resources. We speak from the truth revealed to us through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. Speaking truth is not always comfortable. But it is always right.

Some years ago, a prominent Bible scholar was about to publish a book explaining how his research led him to a conclusion about the authorship of an Old Testament book. He knew his findings would upset the prevailing consensus of modern scholarship, and he dreaded the storm of criticism that would follow. But he went on to say, “There is a worse fate than being misunderstood; it is to be to truth a timid friend.”<sup>3</sup>

As a soldier wearing the belt of truth, you need not be timid about standing strong in defense of God’s reality. From that belt you draw all the resources you need to combat a culture that promotes falsehood and attacks truth.

## WHAT IS TRUTH?

Almost two thousand years ago, a Roman governor asked a profound—and familiar—question of a Man who was about to be executed: “What is truth?” (John 18:38).



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We have no way of knowing whether Pilate's question was a serious inquiry or a sarcastic expression of a weary mind. But we do know that minutes later he turned Jesus over to an angry crowd to be crucified.

R. C. Sproul wrote:

Pilate judged the Truth. He sentenced the Truth. He scourged the Truth. He mocked the Truth. He crucified the Truth.

The irony is that at the very moment he asked his question, "What is truth?" he was staring at the pure incarnation of Truth. The One who is the Truth had just said to him, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."<sup>4</sup>

People have been asking Pilate's question—"What is truth?"—ever since. And, just like Pilate, they have missed the answer.

In March 2017, *Time* magazine displayed a timely cover that asked the question, "Is Truth Dead?" It was designed to mirror a famous cover from fifty years earlier, which asked, "Is God Dead?"

Speaking about those magazines, Brett McCracken noted, "These two covers, 50 years apart, tell an important story. Without God as an ultimate standard of truth, without 'objective' truth that is the same for everyone, all we have are 'truths' as interpreted by individuals."<sup>5</sup>

According to Os Guinness, truth is in trouble:

Truth in any objective or absolute sense, truth that is independent of the mind of the knower, no longer exists. . . .

A simple way to illustrate this lies in the story of the three baseball umpires debating their different philosophies of umpiring. "There's balls and there's strikes," says the first, "and *I call them the way they are.*"

## OVERCOMING FALSEHOOD WITH TRUTH

“No!” exclaims the second umpire. “That’s arrogant. There’s balls and there’s strikes and *I call them the way I see it.*”

“That’s no better,” says the third. “Why beat around the bush? Why not be realistic about what we do? There’s balls and there’s strikes and *they ain’t nothing till I call them.*”

The first umpire represents the traditional view of truth—objective, independent of the mind of the knower, and there to be discovered. The second speaks for moderate relativism—truth “as each person sees it” according to his or her perspective and interpretation. And the third umpire bluntly expresses the radically relativist, or postmodern position—“truth” is not there to be discovered; it’s for each of us to create for ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

In the final analysis, truth corresponds to the first umpire’s position—to reality, to what actually *is*. That’s why truth is found in God, the great I AM. The philosophical search for truth ends with God Himself.<sup>7</sup>

Do you remember the story of Joseph in Egypt, how he was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife and condemned to prison (Genesis 39)? He knew the truth of his innocence, and he knew God knew he was innocent. So in the face of the lies of people, Joseph committed himself to the truth of God, and his faith was vindicated.

That’s not just a Bible story. The same thing happened to Anthony Ray Hinton, who served almost thirty years on death row in an Alabama prison for murders he did not commit. Falsely accused, falsely incarcerated, and turned down over and over by appeals courts, Anthony Hinton kept his faith in the God who he believed knew the truth—and he was eventually exonerated and released from prison in 2015. He told his story in *The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row*.

How do you live under the weight of a lie when you know the truth? Here’s how Anthony Hinton survived:

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When every court was saying “no,” I believed God was still saying yes. I had to somehow find that faith and reach deep down in my soul and believe in the teaching that my mother taught me as a young boy, that God can do everything but fail. He sits high, and he looks low. That’s how I really survived that 30 years of pure hell. . . .

I can say that God might have put me in prison to save my life. He might have put me in prison for me to listen to him, in order to write [my] book, to help change people’s hearts and souls and to help them understand what true forgiveness is all about, to understand what his true friendship is all about, to make people understand what the legal system is all about. I have to believe that God allowed me to go there in order to show me all of these things.<sup>8</sup>

## GOD IS TRUTH

There is such a thing as truth, and the God of truth knows what it is: “His work is perfect . . . His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice” (Deut. 32:4).

God knows the answer to the question Pilate asked Jesus. We may not always recognize or understand how God chooses to act on or reveal to us His truth at any given moment in time. Even if it takes thirty years, as it did with Anthony Ray Hinton, our calling is to trust the God of truth.

When the Bible says, “In the beginning God” (Gen. 1:1), ultimate reality is defined. God is “the self-existent One; He is the Creator of all that exists; God is truth, and all truth is God’s truth.”<sup>9</sup> In the Bible, He is called “the God of truth” on several occasions.

The Father, the first person of the Trinity, is truth:

- “Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD *God of truth*” (Ps. 31:5, emphasis added).

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- “So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the *God of truth*; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the *God of truth*” (Isa. 65:16, emphasis added).

And Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity who came from the Father, is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Because He is God, Jesus is justified in His claim to be “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was and is the communicator of truth, the witness to the truth, the origin of the truth, and the preacher of the truth. He *is* truth embodied. Christ is the final revelation of God to man. Truth is not a system or a philosophy; it’s a Person. If you want to know the truth of God, you must come to know Christ, because He alone is truth.

Just like the first two persons of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit also is truth:

- “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26).
- “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:13).
- “It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6).

Truth is not some nebulous idea, a flexible concept, or a theoretical assumption; it is a solid, clearly defined, unalterable entity. It is ultimate reality, residing in the triune God of the universe, and it is not open to reevaluation or redefinition.

## WE OVERCOME FALSEHOOD BY SEEKING THE TRUTH

We live in an age of relativism, situational ethics, and lies. But as we stand as truth-tellers in a world of falsehood, God does not leave us unprepared. He equips us with the belt of truth so we may be ready to combat deception. So how do we actually outfit ourselves with the belt of truth and overcome falsehood? The Bible tells us it all starts with seeking truth.

The psalmist did this by meditating on God's Word: "Let the proud be ashamed, for they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; but I will meditate on Your precepts" (Ps. 119:78).

To do battle with the enemy, the believer needs to know the truth about God, the truth about Christ, and the truth that is in this book we call the Bible. Here are two critical steps we can take to do just that.

### STUDY THE TRUTH

To seek the truth we must begin by recommitting ourselves to an in-depth study of doctrine. Doctrine is the truth of the Word of God organized and categorized to give us clarity about the issues of life. It is systematized truth.

The more we know of the pieces of Scripture, the less we will puzzle about how to live our daily lives and how our lives fit into an overarching picture. Intimate knowledge of the Bible enables us to understand how every action and event has meaning in relation to other acts and events, whether on a personal or cosmic level. This is why it's imperative that Christians become conversant with the Bible.

I urge you to answer for yourself the question Stu Weber asks: "Are you involved in a regular, rigorous regimen of Bible study? If not, what in the world are you doing? . . . Your mind, your most critical weapon in battle, is braced by doctrine. Your soul is strengthened by biblical knowledge."<sup>10</sup>

## OVERCOMING FALSEHOOD WITH TRUTH

If God's people will make the knowledge of God and His Word the pursuit of their Christian lives, Satan will be thwarted in his every effort to divide, deceive, and destroy.

To seek the truth, you must diligently search the Scriptures. The wonderful news is that our seeking after the truth will never be in vain. God has promised to reward us when we diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

### SUBMIT TO THE TRUTH

Last year I had the privilege of writing the foreword to *Not God Enough*, a new book by pastor and theologian J. D. Greear. My favorite chapter, "You Don't Get Your Own Personal Jesus," included this provocative passage:

When God appeared to Moses, he declared, "I am who I am." "I am who I am" is not "I am whoever you want me to be."

Can we imagine how offensive it must be to God when we attempt to reshape him according to our preferences? How would you like it if someone did that to you? . . .

My guess is that you'd be offended. If we wouldn't like someone else doing that to us, why would we think it's OK to do that with God? Do we think that our idea of God is better than who he actually is?

Have we forgotten who we are talking about?<sup>11</sup>

Counterfeit truth is never more on display than in the way we often hear people speak of God in today's world. "My God wants me to be rich." "The God I believe in would never send anyone to hell." "How dare your God claim to be the only way to heaven!"

It reminds us of a statement attributed to Voltaire: "God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to return the favor ever since."

God is not my God or your God; He is simply God. He has never

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changed, and He never will. It is God's desire to change us into His image, but we have neither the authority nor the ability to change God into our image. It is simply not our place to create a God who makes us feel good about the way we're doing life.

As believers, we're called to overcome falsehood with truth. We aren't called to make up truth but to submit to the truth that is found in God—and to never waver. Today more than ever before in history, James Russell Lowell's famous words ring true:

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and,  
    behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping  
    watch above his own.<sup>12</sup>

## WE OVERCOME FALSEHOOD BY SPEAKING THE TRUTH

Between 1963 and 1974, Coach John Wooden led the UCLA men's basketball team to ten NCAA national championships—including seven championships in a row between 1966 and 1972. Though he died in 2010 at age ninety-nine, he remains a legend in his field. A basketball genius and a mentor and guide to his players, Wooden was more concerned about them learning how to live a good life than anything else. If they lived well, he said, they would play well.

Wooden's father-like coaching style seemed odd in the turbulent years during which he coached. Bill Walton, one of Wooden's players who went on to great success as a professional player, said this about his coach: "We thought he was nuts, but in all his preachings and teachings, everything he told us turned out to be true."<sup>13</sup>

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“Everything he told us turned out to be true.” Can the people in your life say that about you? Or have you bought into the cultural trend that expects the truth to be embellished, massaged, exaggerated, withheld, or reversed when it suits your situation?

Unfortunately, there’s a sanctioned form of lying used by some to justify not telling the truth. It’s called “spin.” Spin is the recasting, reinterpretation, or revising of the truth to make it more palatable. The point is not to be truthful; it’s to reinterpret facts as necessary to take the edge off the truth and make it more politically correct and less offensive for your own goals.

But in God’s sight, spin is nothing short of lying, and it is not acceptable in His sight:

- “These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:16–19).
- “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Prov. 12:22).
- “‘These are the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,’ says the LORD” (Zech. 8:16–17).

Our words, spoken or written, cannot be taken back. Once a lie is out there, it has a life of its own. Even if the effects can be stopped or reversed, the reputation of the liar is forever damaged.



## OVERCOMERS SPEAK THE TRUTH BOLDLY

The apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor’” (Eph. 4:25).

It’s not easy to be an honest friend. But if you’re lucky enough to have one or two, you know they’re the friends you turn to when you need truth the most.

Pastor and author Chip Ingram wrote about four people who “loved me enough to tell me things about my life that no one else cared enough to say.”<sup>14</sup> Each addressed a different part of his life: relationships, character, ministry, and giftedness.

- *Relationships:* When he’d been a Christian about a year, Chip began a relationship with a non-Christian girl. And the relationship was heading in a dangerous direction. An older Christian friend took him aside and shared scriptures with him about being “unequally yoked” (2 Cor. 6:14–18) with unbelievers. Chip didn’t like what he was hearing, of course, but after praying about it, he realized his friend had probably saved him from a great deal of trouble.
- *Character:* During college, when Chip was involved in a campus ministry, one of the leaders came to him to share some scriptures and talk about his pride. The leader was concerned that Chip’s motivation seemed to be more to impress others than to please the Lord. Again, after prayer, Chip realized that his team leader’s words were painful but true.
- *Ministry:* When Chip began pastoring a small rural church that was growing under his ministry, a long-time member warned him about letting church politics influence what he preached. He’d gotten subtle pressure from some members about his emphasis on preaching the

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truths of God's Word. Chip reevaluated his priorities and knew he had to stand firm regardless of the consequences.

- *Giftedness:* After Chip and his wife participated in a leadership development seminar, they met with one of the leaders. He had glowing things to say about how Chip's wife was using her gifts, but to Chip he said, "You're lazy. . . . You're a lazy preacher. . . . You're not doing near with your gift what you could be doing." Chip went home and changed his whole approach to his preaching ministry, putting in more time in diligent preparation and evaluation.<sup>15</sup>

Those four people changed the course of Chip's life. They were living illustrations of Proverbs 27:5–6: "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

## OVERCOMERS SPEAK THE TRUTH LOVINGLY

Not only are we to speak truthfully, but we are to speak the truth "in love" (Eph. 4:15).

A fourth-grade teacher recovering from surgery received a get-well card from her class. It read, "Dear Mrs. Fisher, your fourth-grade class wishes you a speedy recovery by a vote of 15 to 14." I don't know if this story is true (probably not), but it hits only one of Paul's two admonitions in Ephesians 4:15: truth and love. The kids spoke the truth with a pinch of love when they wished their teacher a speedy recovery. But reporting the tally of the votes? Not so much.

In John 13:35, Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Our words and actions must be clothed with love. Truth delivered harshly, judgmentally, unkindly, unsympathetically, or without knowing all the facts or context will likely not be heard or appreciated.

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Kathleen LeBlanc shared an experience she had while playing Scrabble with a ninety-three-year-old woman in a local care home. It illustrates how words spoken in a loving manner can overcome falsehood and bring life:

After our game, she outright asked me, “What do you think of doctor-assisted suicide?” and pointed to an article from the paper on the topic. I told her that I felt it was very sad that anyone should feel the need to take their life, and it’s our failure as a society when anyone is left feeling this way. After some time discussing this, she expressed to me that she can sympathize with people who don’t feel they have a reason to live in their suffering, as she too, often wonders why God still has her “stuck in this wheelchair.”

With tears in my eyes, I was able to tell her what a joy she is to me, and that I look forward to visiting her every week. She teared up as well, shock in her eyes, and said, “Really? Is that true?” I nodded, unable to get more words out. “Well then, perhaps there is reason enough for me to be here.”<sup>16</sup>

## WE OVERCOME FALSEHOOD BY LIVING THE TRUTH

Our Lord illustrated the power of truth in the way He lived His life. When Jesus’ enemies came to arrest Him, He said to them, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46). Nobody said a word. Do you know why? Because they did not have anything they could say. They had nothing legitimate to convict Him of because He was absolutely everything He had claimed to be.

When Jesus went to the cross, the centurion overseeing the execution said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39). How did he figure that out? He simply watched Jesus die as He had lived,

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exhibiting attributes that only the Son of God could possess. He saw Christ living the truth.

And the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus said, “This Man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41). Why would he say that? He too saw the truth exhibited in Christ even under the stress of such horrendous circumstances.

The Overcomer must be clothed with truthfulness not only proclaimed, but also integrated into his or her life. Listen to the words of the apostle John: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John v. 4).

To walk in the truth means living out the biblical tenets of the Christian faith. It means, as the saying goes, ensuring our walk matches our talk. To help us do that, the Lord has given us two practices: confession and correction.

## IT TAKES CONFESSION TO LIVE THE TRUTH

The first step to living the truth is to be honest about where you really are in life and in your walk with God. In John Ortberg’s book *The Me I Want to Be*, he talks about the healing that comes from confessing our deepest secrets to a trustworthy and loving person:

One of the most important moments of my spiritual life was when I sat down with a longtime friend and said, “I don’t want to have any secrets anymore.” I told him everything I was most ashamed of. . . . I told him about my jealousies, my cowardice, how I hurt my wife with my anger. I told him about my history with money and my history with sex. I told him about deceit and regrets that keep me up at night. I felt vulnerable because I was afraid that I was going to lose connection with him. Much to my surprise, he did not even look away.

I will never forget his next words.

“John,” he said. “I have never loved you more than I love you

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right now.” The very truth about me that I thought would drive him away became a bond that drew us closer together. He then went on to speak with me about secrets he had been carrying.<sup>17</sup>

God desires for us to be whole, to know and love the truth at the very core of our being: “Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom” (Ps. 51:6). One of the ways we come to experience this wholeness is through confession. As James wrote, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

### IT TAKES CORRECTION TO LIVE THE TRUTH

To overcome falsehood and be fully aligned with the truth, we must ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and lead us in righteousness. This is what David did in his prayer recorded in Psalm 139: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (vv. 23–24).

Why did David pray that prayer? Because he realized that sin in his life could make him unfit for the responsibility he had been given. He wanted God to shine the light of truth into his life. He asked God to identify any wickedness that was in his life and lead him on a different path.

The theological word for what David was describing is *repentance*. It means to correct the way you are living and thinking. True repentance opens the door for you to walk into a new life, and when you step into this new world God shuts the door on the mistakes and sins of your past. Your task is to learn from those mistakes, to use them to transform your life. Often, this happens quickly at first, and in big ways. Over time, it can be more subtle. Repentance is a lifelong process.

Author and pastor Mark Buchanan explains:

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Almost weekly, I ask people to repent. . . . I invite them to see things God's way. To align themselves, stem to stern, with God's purposes. Initially that alignment is violent and dramatic, a 180-degree turn. But thereafter it's mostly course corrections; 15 degrees here, 5 degrees there.

But every turn, by whatever degree, is good news. Every turn moves us closer to where we want to be.<sup>18</sup>

Almighty God wants sincere believers who face up to the sin in their lives and then face it down through confession and repentance. This is the way an Overcomer learns to live the truth.

## TURN UP THE VOLUME ON TRUTH

One of the vivid memories of my growing-up years took place in a little village in Indiana called Winona Lake. This was the home of the Winona Lake Conference Grounds, and during the fifties and sixties it was a major conference center for evangelical Christians.

During that time my father was working on a graduate degree at the Winona Lake School of Theology. Every summer he took our whole family to Winona Lake for several weeks.

One of the groups that gathered in Winona Lake each year was Youth for Christ, at that time a huge and growing nationwide organization. One summer Youth for Christ invited Dr. Billy Graham to speak at their event. The little village was transformed into a media center as thousands of people came to see the celebrated evangelist.

Dr. Graham was to speak in the Billy Sunday Tabernacle, a throw-back sawdust-trail pavilion—yes, there was actually sawdust on the floor. The pavilion seated more than 7,500 people on hard wooden benches. The huge windows were flung open to allow the lake breeze to cool the building and let people outside see what was going on

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inside. On this night, people stood twelve deep all around the tabernacle. Every seat inside and every spot where someone could stand was occupied for hours before the event.

A friend of mine operated the follow spotlight from the roof. He invited me to join him for the night, and that's how I ended up having one of the best places in the house to watch this dynamic young evangelist.

I don't remember the details of Billy Graham's message that night, but I do remember he preached the truth: that Jesus Christ is the only hope for lost mankind. When he gave the invitation, scores of people, young and old, came forward to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. I never really recovered from that moment.

Billy Graham was a truth-teller, the greatest preacher of the gospel message in modern-day history. He opened the door for all of us who have used the power of radio and television for the purpose of preaching the truth to the masses.

As I was finishing this chapter, Billy Graham died. He was ninety-nine years old, and for over seventy years he dominated the evangelical landscape. My wife, Donna, and I attended his funeral held under a gigantic tent in Charlotte, North Carolina. As I sat there surrounded by almost every evangelical leader I'd ever met, I felt a great sadness—a great sense of loss.

This megaphone for the gospel had been silenced by death. And then I thought, *It's true that the megaphone has been silenced—there will never be another Billy Graham. But there are thousands of microphones still left. I cannot be a megaphone, but I can be a microphone for the truth of the gospel.*

On that day in Charlotte, I made a commitment to turn up the volume on telling the truth of the gospel. I challenge you to do the same.

*You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

—JOHN 8:32