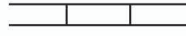


REVISED & EXPANDED

CHARLES F. STANLEY BIBLE STUDY SERIES



OVERCOMING THE ENEMY

LIVE IN VICTORY OVER
TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS



CHARLES F. STANLEY

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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

OVERCOMING THE ENEMY
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INTRODUCTION

PREPARING TO OVERCOME THE ENEMY

Many people in the world today believe that the devil does not exist. They believe that he is merely an ancient myth—a metaphor to explain the presence of evil in our world. But the Bible teaches clearly that the devil is real . . . and that he wants to destroy us.

This is the bad news. The good news is that Jesus has already defeated the devil—utterly, permanently, and irrevocably. Of course, this does not mean that we will never be confronted by the enemy of our soul. On the contrary, the devil is still actively seeking our harm. But the power of Jesus Christ is all we need to defeat the devil every time he attacks.

This book can be used by you alone or by several people in a small-group study. At various times, you will be asked to relate to the material in one of the following four ways.

First, what new insights have you gained? Make notes about the insights you have. You may want to record them in your Bible or in a separate journal. As you reflect on your new understanding, you are likely to see how God has moved in your life.

Second, have you ever had a similar experience? You approach the Bible from your own unique background . . . your own particular set of understandings about the world that you bring with you when you open God's Word. For this reason, it is important to consider how your experiences are shaping your understanding and allow yourself to be open to the truth that God reveals.

Third, how do you feel about the material? While you should not depend solely on your emotions as a gauge for your faith, it is important for you to be aware of them as you study a passage of Scripture and can freely express them to God. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will use your emotions to compel you to look at your life in a different or challenging way.

Fourth, in what way do you feel challenged to respond or to act? God's Word may inspire you or challenge you to take a particular action. Take this challenge seriously and find ways to move into it. If God reveals a particular need that He wants you to address, take that as His "marching orders." God will empower you to do something with the challenge that He has just given you.

Start your Bible study sessions in prayer. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear. As you conclude your study, ask the Lord to seal what you have learned so you will not forget it. Ask Him to help you grow into the fullness of the nature and character of Christ Jesus.

I encourage you to keep the Bible at the center of your study. A genuine Bible study stays focused on God's Word and promotes a growing faith and a closer walk with the Holy Spirit in each person who participates.

LESSON 1



OUR FOREMOST ENEMY

IN THIS LESSON

Learning: Is the devil real?

Growing: Who would want to harm me spiritually?

Believers in Christ Jesus have three main enemies in life: *the world*, *the flesh*, and *the devil*. These enemies are constantly present to harass us, create conflict for us, and generate trouble for us. Although we cannot escape these enemies completely, we are assured of victory over them as long as we rely on the Lord Jesus for our wisdom, power, and ability to endure.

The *world* includes anything of a physical nature that might hinder us in our walk with Christ or tempt us to sin. Contrary to what

some people think, the world is not getting better. If anything it is getting worse, because so many more possibilities for evil exist today than hundreds or thousands of years ago—the world has more people, greater opportunities for evil alliances and evil behavior, more technology for delivering tempting messages, more information about how to engage in evil, and more varieties of false religions. The ways and means for committing evil have exploded, not diminished.

The *flesh* has to do with the nature of the human heart, which has not changed since the creation of man. The human heart still has a bent toward darkness, evil, and sin. We have desires that God wants us to meet in ways that are in keeping with His commandments. However, the temptation always exists for us to meet those desires in ways that are ungodly. We never lose our human, fleshly desires, and we never lose our capacity to yield to temptation. These desires are with us until we die, because they reside within us.

Peter described the *devil* this way: “Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Each of us—whether we realize it or not—faces a spiritual battle with the devil today. The very nature of the enemy is to defeat us, to destroy us, and to kill everything that is important to us (see John 10:10). His pursuit of us is persistent, unrelenting, and always aimed at the most vulnerable area of our lives.

1. Why does Peter describe the devil as your adversary? What images come to mind when you think of the devil as a “roaring lion”?

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2. Why might some people think the devil does not exist? What does the Bible teach?

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A LESSON IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Jesus had to continually battle these spiritual enemies throughout His ministry. One of the first events that occurred in Jesus' ministry was His baptism by John in the Jordan River. Luke writes, "It came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased'" (3:21-22).

Immediately after this high point in Jesus' life, we find the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into a wilderness. Luke tells us the reason for this journey: "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry" (4:1-2).

I am sure that Satan tempted Jesus when He was a child growing up in Nazareth. We know for a fact that Satan tempted Jesus during this time of fasting in the wilderness. In truth, Satan tempted Jesus throughout His ministry. In Luke's account, we read that "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time" (verse 13). Satan departed from Jesus because he had been told to leave . . . but only for a season.

Jesus had to frequently battle the forces of the *world* in the form of the Jewish religious leaders and Roman authorities. He battled the

forces of the *flesh*, for “we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He was continually under attack by the *devil*, who tried everything to get Jesus to abandon His mission and avoid the cross. Jesus once even recognized Satan using His disciple Peter to try to achieve this goal. When Peter tried to tell Jesus that He would not be crucified, Christ responded, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23).

Satan’s last-ditch effort occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was there, whispering to Jesus, “You can avert this. You can avoid this. You can accomplish the same purposes without having to go to the cross. You don’t have to do this.” As Luke relates, “Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. When He came to the place, He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation’” (Luke 22:39–40). Jesus knew that Satan was already working on Him.

However, in the end Jesus said, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (verse 42). Jesus submitted His will to that of God the Father—and secured the eternal victory. The same will be true of us when we submit our desires to God and rely on His strength for the victory.

3. “Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness” (Luke 4:1). Why do you think the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert when He knew that Jesus would be tested there?

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4. “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2–3). Why can you “count it all joy” when you face trials? What can these trials—with the help of the Holy Spirit—produce within you?

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A NEED FOR DAILY VICTORY

Just as in Jesus’ time, the world, the flesh, and the devil are still with us. So, our best recourse is to learn how to deal with them and have *daily* victory over them. It would be wonderful if we could defeat these enemies once and for all, but this isn’t a provision God has made. Instead, He has provided us with the Holy Spirit, who resides within us to help us in our struggle.

Jesus described the work of the Holy Spirit when He said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:25–26). The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to say *no* to the temptations of the world and to overcome our fleshly desires. The Holy Spirit also enables us to withstand the assaults of the devil on a day-to-day basis and experience peace and wholeness even in the face of severe spiritual opposition.

We face a daily struggle, but we can also experience daily victories. God calls us to live one day at a time. We will not have a single, definitive showdown with the devil in our lives—a moment in which

Overcoming the Enemy

he is defeated and made unable to accuse or torment us again—but we can experience a *daily* victory over the devil. We can say no to the temptations he presents *today*. We can use our faith to defeat his assault against our minds, bodies, and spirits *today*. We can pray against his efforts to destroy us *today*. A string of daily victories makes a victorious life!

- 5.** “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:17). What does it mean that “the flesh lusts against the Spirit”? Give practical examples.

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- 6.** In what sense is the Spirit contrary to the flesh? Why must a Christian deny one—flesh or Spirit—in order to indulge the other?

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AN ASSURANCE OF VICTORY

As we will discuss in this study, we battle against the world and the flesh by first learning how to discern God's will in a given situation and then by having the courage to say no to evil. These battles are won or lost on the battleground of our physical, material, and emotional lives. It is an *ongoing* battle to overcome the world and the flesh because the devil—the enemy of our souls—is behind these battles. Ultimately, our battle in each of these areas is spiritual in nature. It is waged in the spirit, and it has eternal and far-reaching spiritual consequences.

The devil's purpose is not simply to irritate us or make our lives difficult. His goal is to destroy us in the spiritual realm. The devil will use whatever is made available to him as a foothold on which to establish his evil purposes. His ultimate goal is to annihilate us—physically, materially, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

However, as we focus on this spiritual warfare, we will do so from the perspective that the devil is a defeated foe. Of course, we cannot defeat him by our own authority—rather, he has been defeated by Christ. Jesus referred to the devil as the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31), and He said of him, “he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). The devil has no authority, power, or influence over Jesus. The book of Revelation graphically details Jesus' definitive victory over the devil when He casts him “into the lake of fire and brimstone,” where the devil “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (20:10).

This may lead you to ask, “If the devil is defeated, why do we still have to fight?” The victory over the devil is assured in reality, *but it is not yet accomplished in time*. The fate of the devil is sealed, but he still has access to humankind until the day when God brings this age to an end. The existence of the devil is related to our having free will as human beings. God has given human beings the ability to choose . . . and that includes our ability to choose evil. The devil, as the supreme agent of evil, has the power to tempt us and to oppress us.

Overcoming the Enemy

What we do know with certainty is that *whenever* the devil is confronted with Jesus, the Lord Jesus wins. When we place our faith and hope in Christ and resist the devil, the devil cannot score a victory over us. We may lose battles against the devil from time to time, but *we will not lose the war* because we belong to Christ. It is important to keep this assurance of victory at the forefront of our thinking as we study spiritual warfare. If we look only at the devil and his tactics, it is easy to become discouraged or fearful. But if we keep our focus on Jesus Christ, however, we remain strong and alive in our spirits.

7. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). What does it mean to love the world?

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8. Why is love of the world incompatible with love of God?

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THE GREAT VALUE OF CHRISTIAN ALLIES

Everyone faces spiritual battles. And every person alive knows what it means to come up against the devil's assaults. For this reason, this is an area in our Christian walk in which each of us should have great empathy toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of our greatest privileges and responsibilities is to help our fellow believers fight and win spiritual battles. No person is intended to confront the devil alone. Christ assures us that He is always present. Even so, we are to function as the *body* of Christ, one to another. We are to join forces with those who are under attack by the enemy and become fellow warriors, doing battle in the spirit realm through our prayers and loving support.

As we face spiritual battles, we are wise to turn to our brothers and sisters in Christ and ask for their help. As we see others facing spiritual battles, we are admonished by the Bible to go to them and help them win a victory through Christ. We are to fight against our common enemy, Satan, and his demons. Imagine how much would be accomplished in our churches today if believers would band together against their true enemy rather than wasting their time and energy bickering with one another or fighting against matters of lesser importance!

So I encourage you to see your Bible-study group and your fellow Christians as a band of God's warriors, powerfully equipped for battle through your relationship with Christ Jesus and your empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Expect your study of the Word to equip you to help one another as you continue to build your relationship with other believers in your church or community, even after this study has ended.

9. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16). To *admonish* means to warn and guide another back to the right path. What are some ways you are admonishing your fellow believers in Christ?

10. “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another” (Hebrews 10:24–25). Why do you think the Bible stresses the importance of believers joining together and doing life together? What strength does this provide to a believer?

TODAY AND TOMORROW

Today: The devil is real, but Jesus has utterly defeated him.

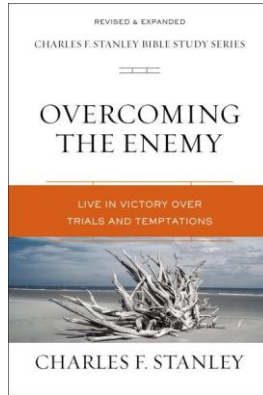
Tomorrow: I will ask the Lord to help me see where I can strengthen my spiritual life this week.



CLOSING PRAYER

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Heavenly Father, thank You for promising to be with us as we confront the enemies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We know these forces are constantly present to harass us, but as we rely on Your strength, we can be assured of the victory. Thank You also for Your comforting words that You set limitations on our temptations so that we can bear them successfully, victoriously, and triumphantly. We pray that the Holy Spirit will help each of us to examine our lives and evaluate what really is going on—and rely on the promise that Jesus Christ came to set us free from bondage and the snares of the enemy.



OVERCOMING THE ENEMY

by Charles F. Stanley

Defeat the devil every time he attacks.

Many people today believe the devil does not exist. They think he is merely an ancient myth or a metaphor to explain the presence of evil in our world. However, the Bible clearly teaches that Satan is very real—and that he will stop at nothing to bring about our destruction. That's the bad news. But as Dr. Charles Stanley explains in *Overcoming the Enemy*, the good news is that Jesus Christ has already defeated the devil—utterly, permanently, and irrevocably. While this does not mean we will never be confronted with his evil, we have the promise that in Christ we will always have the victory over him.

The **Charles F. Stanley Bible Study Series** is a unique approach to Bible study, incorporating biblical truth, personal insights, emotional responses, and a call to action. Each study draws on Dr. Stanley's many years of teaching the guiding principles found in God's Word, showing how we can apply them in practical ways to every situation we face. This edition of the series has been completely revised and updated, and includes two brand-new lessons from Dr. Stanley.

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