

Living in Victoryⁱ

Praise:

Begin to prepare your heart and mind for the study by listening to and/or singing the worship songs from the services. Choose two or three songs from the following list:

Alive Forever Amen – Hillsong

Nothing Is Impossible – Planetshakers

Mighty to Save – Hillsong

Glorious Day – Casting Crowns

Shake – MercyMe

Victory in Jesus – Bart Millard

Furious – Jeremy Riddle

Beneath the Waters – Hillsong

Jesus Paid It All – Kristian Stanfill

One Thing Remains – Jesus Culture

Relentless – Hillsong United

Prayer:

Following the praise music, pray for understanding of the scripture, enlightenment that the Holy Spirit may guide your understanding, discernment that you may see how this lesson applies to you, and courage to surrender those things that hinder your spiritual growth.

Preparation:

(5-10 min)

1. Write on a piece of paper three sentences that describe or summarize the message, “Living in Victory.”
2. Take turns reading aloud the summaries. After all have shared, discuss the descriptions/summaries for the remaining few minutes (of the 10 total).

Reviewing the Scriptural Basis:

(5 min)

Have two or three people take turns by reading aloud the following scripture. As the verse is read, silently reflect on the words you hear and what they mean for you.

1 Corinthians 15:57 (NLT)

But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Breaking it Down

(30 min)

Break into smaller groups of three or four people. Read the key segments of today’s message, and answer together the questions related thereto.

The Healing Power of Christ

Throughout the past several weeks, we’ve been studying—and hopefully learning/putting into practice—the key processes and choices necessary to heal our hurts, hang-ups, and habits through the healing power of Christ. Our journey now begs the question of how to keep the momentum. We’ve come this far, but how do we keep going?—is it possible to live in victory? Jesus’ resurrection offers a resounding, “YES, it is!” But, our continual, spiritual growth is not automatic inasmuch as it requires maintenance for us to keep growing in a healthy manner. No matter how far we’ve come and no matter how powerfully God has worked in our lives, the possibility always exists for a spiritual “relapse.”

Relapse is a term John Baker uses in his book, *Life's Healing Choices* (p. 206); this book has been our guiding resource throughout our current series. Numerous dictionaries define *relapse* this way (collectively): “to fall or slip back into a former state, illness, vice, or practice; especially after an apparent recovery.” While relapse is common in a Christian’s spiritual walk, it is not inevitable. It is possible to maintain the healing process and to live in victory. But, in order to do that and also to prevent relapse, we first have to understand what causes it. It is in our nature to repeat the patterns of our past; however, when we recognize its destructive pattern, we can stop a relapse before it goes too far.

The Predictable Pattern of Relapse

1) Complacency

During this study series, we’ve made some real progress in dealing with our hurts, hang-ups and habits. We’ve grown spiritually, and we’ve celebrated our progress. What happens, though, is that our progress starts to look and feel like our final victory. We begin to think (foolishly) that we’ve overcome the opposition, won the war, and now we’re sitting back and celebrating our success. That’s a comfortable place to be, but that complacency is a dangerously deceptive place to be. The Bible warns that, “...the complacency of fools will destroy them” (Proverbs 1:32b NIV). When we lose sight of what God has done for us and begin to think we’re doing fine because of what we have accomplished, then we’re setting the stage for relapse: Enter Complacency, Stage Left.

1. Looking back over some of your accomplishments (weight-loss goals, new year’s resolutions, etc.), how, when or where did complacency play a role?
2. What does complacency look like in your day-to-day living?
3. How do you overcome complacency?

2) (Misplaced) Confidence

Almost hand-in-hand with complacency is misplaced confidence. When we become complacent, we quickly forget the source of our help and hope. Having achieved some level of victory, we fool ourselves into thinking we’re responsible and that we can handle whatever comes our way. We may even boast about it: “Hmpf. Harold may need help, but I don’t.” Throughout his epistles, the Apostle Paul cautions us about this kind of boasting—believing in own merit and self-serving ambition; James also writes about the dangers of misplaced confidence and boastfulness: “As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.” (James 4:16 NIV) It’s when we lose sight of the Source of our accomplishments that misplaced confidence will take root and lead to relapse.

1. Describe a time where you had misplaced confidence in your own ability to handle a situation? What happened?
2. What are the similarities/differences between pride and misplaced confidence?

3) Confusion

This phase in the pattern of relapse is where we become confused with the reality of our situation. Sometimes our memories skew the details of what happened to us or even what is happening to us. We might compare our hurts, hang-ups, and habits to someone else’s and then think, “Maybe my problem wasn’t that big a deal after all.” Or, a little voice in our head says something like, “You’re doing great right now. You don’t need a support group—those are for people with *real* issues.”

The prophet, Jeremiah, describes the nature of wickedness that confuses the unsuspecting, those comfortable in their complacency: “Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait for victims like a hunter hiding in a blind. They continually set traps to catch people.” (Jeremiah 5:26 NLT) When we aren’t grounded in God’s power and our need for Him, we become susceptible to and confused by the enemy’s lies. This pattern will ultimately lead to relapse.

1. In what ways have you been confused by the way God works or has worked?
2. Describe a time when you were confused about what God wanted you to do.

4) Compromise

It’s a natural temptation to go back to “that place” that initially landed us in trouble. After all, we probably spent a lot of time there, so why wouldn’t we be tempted to go back to the familiar? “But, when we place ourselves in risky situations, we’ll likely make poor choices.” (p. 207) Jesus warns Peter of the dangers of temptation, which ultimately lead to Jesus’ death; He says, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41 NIV) We would be wise to learn what Jesus taught his disciples—to watch and to pray (and not compromise our progress) in the midst of our tribulations if we hope to remain faithful and obedient to the will of God and continue to receive His healing power.

1. What are some common ways in our culture where Christians are tempted to compromise their faith?
2. How has compromise adversely affected your spiritual life or witness to others?

5) Catastrophe

Another predictable element in relapse is catastrophe. “This is when we actually give in to the old hurt, old hang-up, or old habit.... The catastrophe is simply the end result, the acting-out phase of the pattern.” (p. 208) This simple, yet destructive, choice of surrender opens the door and essentially invites the indwelling of past feelings of shame, regret, unforgiveness, <fill in the blank>. The good news, as we’ve learned throughout this study, is that there is a way to overcome even the return of old hurts, hang-ups, and habits. The Apostle Paul describes it in his explanation of the Resurrection, “Thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death [and relapse] through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57 NLT)

1. Describe a time when you (or when you’ve seen someone else) hit “rock bottom” in your (or his/her) life. What was the result or outcome?
2. Where might a relapse strike you? Or, about what do you feel most vulnerable to relapse? Explain.

Living in Victory

We’ve just read in the preceding segment that victory is achieved by living close to God and by abiding in His presence. He is the source of all victory, and He grants it to those who obey His commands and put their confidence in Him. This principle holds true in all believers’ conflicts (i.e., hurts, hang-ups, and habits), whether physical or spiritual. Before we can embrace this lifestyle of victorious living, however, we must look at the prerequisites to it.

Living in victory requires us to move from...

1) Depending on our own willpower to depending on God's power

There is always a temptation for us to revert to our former ways and try to do things ourselves. Paul cautioned the Galatians about that tendency when he told them, "How can you be so foolish! You began by God's Spirit; do you now want to finish by your own power?" (Galatians 3:3 GNT) It's also why the prophet, Zechariah, spoke this word to God's people, "You will not succeed by your own strength or by your own power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord. (Zechariah 4:6 NCV) We must constantly keep in mind what we've said throughout this series about fixing our own problems: "If we could, we would. But we can't, so we won't." We live in victory when we say, "I know that I can't, but I am confident that God can!"

1. How would your life be different if you depended more on God's power than on your own willpower?
2. What are some ways in which we can show we're relying on God and His power?

2) Living in isolation to living in community

One of the misunderstandings of post-modern Christianity is that it's okay for a relationship to be "just me and God." If you've invited people to church, you may have heard a similar response to the tune of, "No, thanks. I believe in God, but I don't need to go to church." This is not biblical Christianity. You can't be a follower of Jesus without being a part of a Body of Christ. We are created to be in relationship with one another, and the Bible makes it very clear that we need each other: "Don't stop meeting together with other believers...instead, encourage each other." (Hebrews 10:25 CEB) You don't have to be a social butterfly to worship with other believers. Your very presence among the Body of Christ is what brings you out of isolation and into community.

1. Why is it difficult for Christians to live in isolation from other believers? What are the pitfalls of doing so?
2. Describe a benefit you have received from being a part of a community of believers.

3) Being prideful to being humble

It's one thing to be proud of our victories, but it's another to think we've accomplished them on our own. As we progress through this journey and practice the steps of receiving the healing power of Christ, we must be intentional about giving credit where credit is due. Proverbs 11:2 (NIV) reads, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." Wisdom recognizes the importance of self-control, which will help us to avoid relapse. James also gives us reason to move from being prideful to being humble: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6 NRSV) God delights in our accomplishments, and He celebrates our victories with us when we live humbly before Him. This is evidenced in the words of the psalmist, "For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory." (Psalm 149:4 NIV)

1. What does Christian humility look like?
2. What are some things you can do to stay humble and prevent pride from creeping into your life?
3. What "victory" would you like to see Jesus bring to your life? Pray for it to happen and then give God thanks.

In Closing:

Relapsing, going back to our former ways, is a possibility, and we must guard against our natural tendency to do so. In contrast, living in victory is a certainty when we practice without ceasing the necessary steps throughout these studies. Lest we forget what the psalmist says, “With God we will gain the victory...” (Psalm 60:12 NIV).

Close in Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we come to You—hands in hands—and ask for Your mercy upon our broken lives. We confess that we often become complacent in our spiritual lives and give in to our own prideful nature. Forgive us, we pray, Lord. We need You; we need Your Holy Spirit to reign in our lives...to pick us up when we stumble, to wipe away the tears, and to heal our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Guard us from the temptations that cause us to relapse so that we can “stay the course” and live in victory through Your Son, Jesus. For it is in His name we pray. Amen.

The Blessing (say this as a group):

*“Do not be afraid as you go out to fight your [hurts, hang-ups, and habits] today! Do not lose heart or panic or tremble before them. For the Lord your God is going with you! He will fight for you against your [hurts, hang-ups, and habits], and **he will give you victory!**” (Deuteronomy 20:3b-4 NLT)*

Action Items for the Week Ahead:

Review the key points of today’s message and the scriptures related thereto. In the week ahead, reflect upon those scriptures, and consider the following:

1. **PRAY** about it: Pray through the Lord’s Prayer and consider how each petition is a way to acknowledge the healing power of Christ and to avoid the dangers of relapse. For example, praying, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,” reminds us that we are not God and acknowledges His existence and character. For more help in this endeavor, see pp. 220-221 of *Life’s Healing Choices*.
2. **WRITE** about it: Journal about how you’re doing in terms of your physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual well-being. What is your body telling you? What are you feeling? Are you at peace with others? Are you relying on God? See pp. 213-217 for more detailed guidance about conducting this personal evaluation.
3. **SHARE** about it: Tell someone you trust what you wrote about in the previous section. With him or her, review the patterns of relapse (complacency, confidence, confusion, compromise, and catastrophe) and ask that person to help you look honestly at your life to see if any of these patterns are present.

¹This sermon series, “The Healing Power of Christ,” is based on the book, *Life’s Healing Choices*, by John Baker. ©2007 by Richard D. Warren and John E. Baker. All quotes used in this discussion guide are taken from this book and annotated accordingly.