

# Victory Over One's Worst Enemy

by Paris Reidhead

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*The greatest enemy we must deal with is ourselves, and we can overcome this enemy by turning around and looking at the cross from the inside, discovering our own flaws and weaknesses and seeking transformation.*

**Duration:** 36:50

**Scripture:** John 10:10, Romans 5:8, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 4:13, Colossians 3:3, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Victory", "Victory in Christ", "Overcoming Self"

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## Description

Paris Reidhead emphasizes that our greatest enemy is ourselves, revealing his personal struggles with spirituality and critical attitudes during his missionary work in Africa. He shares his journey of disillusionment and the realization that true victory comes from recognizing our identity in Christ, being crucified with Him, and understanding that He died not just for our sins but to transform us from within. Reidhead encourages believers to seek a deeper relationship with God, moving beyond mere intellectual knowledge to a heartfelt experience of His grace and power. He concludes with a call to embrace the resurrection life of Christ, which empowers us to overcome our negative traits and habits.

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## Transcript

Shall we bow our hearts in prayer? Our Father, we're asking for a very special anointing upon our minds this morning, that as we consider this extremely important theme, that we may have light from thine own heart, thine own mind upon us. Enable us to see and to grasp that which we're considering, and to understand the implications of it, and to practice it day by day. We ask with thanksgiving, in Jesus name, Amen.

It was announced that we'd speak this morning on the subject of knowing and dealing with your greatest enemy. It's not hard to identify that enemy. Your greatest enemy, of course, is you.

I am my own greatest enemy. In my case, it was a very interesting way that I discovered this. I spent seven years after high school getting ready to be a missionary, and arrived in the sedan, along with my wife Marjorie, in 1945, in October, thinking that we were prepared for the task that we were undertaking.

Certainly, we'd completed the required training, or we wouldn't have been there. But more than that, I'd had several years experience as pastor, and we'd had linguistic training. We'd finished Summer Institute of Linguistics.

In all, we thought we were quite well prepared. And we arrived there expecting to be able to go to a tribe down in Equatoria province, only to be found that the territory was closed to our mission. We couldn't get in there.

And in the course of a meeting with the civil secretary of the Sudan, he asked if the mission would be willing to second, that is, turn us over to work under the direction of deputy director of education from the southern Sudan, a man by the name of George Janson Smith. And it was agreed by the mission authorities that this is what would happen. We were given the task at the request of the deputy director of education of going to some ten tribes, language groups, along the Sudan-Ethiopian border, and doing a word study, that is, a language comparison.

The effort was to find out if in these ten tribes that had had no contact with missionaries or with education, there was a common language that might be used so that there could be a bridge between the people and education. They did not know Arabic, southern Arabic at all, or maybe one or two did, but they had been in jail or somewhere and had picked it up, but they didn't really know Arabic. And they just were sitting there, little pockets of people.

And our job, as I said, was to do this word study. Well, it wasn't long after arriving in the Sudan that I discovered that I wasn't nearly as spiritual as I had planned to be. I'd done a lot of reading of missionary biographies.

I'd read most of them that I or at least as they had to pertain to Africa. And I knew that I was going to be, because I'd determined to be, a spiritual missionary. I was going to spend as many hours in prayer as praying high did spend.

I was going to be as diligent in language study as Mary Schleser had been. I was going to work as hard at understanding the customs of the people as Dan Crawford had been. All of these things seemed quite attainable.

And especially when you're back in Indiana, and you're getting ready to go to Africa, they all seem to be within your grasp. However, when I got to Africa, I discovered that the three weeks wasn't necessary. We had a breakdown on the good old ship Gripsholm.

The three weeks that had taken us to get from New York to Egypt had really no effect on me other than to make me seasick once or twice. And as try as I would, I failed to gather much spiritual benefit out of being seasick for any even for a length of time. So the consequence was, I made the horrible discovery that when I got to Africa, I was the same me that had left Indiana.

Now, obviously, I had planned that when I got to Africa, I was going to be that new me that I'd been thinking about and visualizing this one who was going to spend three or four hours a day in prayer before the sun came up. And another two or three after it went down. But I found that somehow or other, the practices that I'd engaged in back in Indiana were the ones that I was following.

Well, that's quite a disillusioning thing. You've prepared yourself to attain to a certain degree of spirituality and you aren't. The next thing that was hard for me to discover was, and to accept, was the fact that my missionary colleagues were not the giants of spirituality that I had anticipated they would be.

I figured that they were going to be spending three to four hours a day in prayer before the sun came up and be a good example to me. That they were going to be paragons of Christian character. They were

going to show all of the fruit of the spirit and they were going to be.

But I discovered something else that was rather disheartening. As I was, as I had been when I was in Indiana, they were as they had been wherever it was they came from to be in the sedan. And this was very, very difficult to accept.

Now, when you find out that you aren't as spiritual as you want to be and your colleagues aren't as spiritual as obviously they ought to be, how are you going to adjust to this? Well, it's simple. You see, the best defense is a strong offense. And rather than wait for someone to discover your weakness, it seemed at the time, though I never don't recall ever simply writing it down as a policy, it just became one.

The better course would be to point out to one's colleagues that they weren't as spiritual as they they thought they were or be. I thought they should be. And so I found that in a very short time, along with the Atterburn and the Quinine, that I was taking something else was being ingested or ingested, as the case might be.

I found that I had a very critical mind. Oh, I could spot a fault in a missionary halfway across the sedan. And I found that I had also a censorious spirit.

That is, I would censor others' attitudes and expressions. And I also found that I had a rather serious resentment of being censored and criticized by my colleagues. Now, since I had a censorious spirit and a critical mind, like begets like, it wasn't long until some of them were beginning to find that thing I was trying so hard to cover, that I wasn't that paragon of spirituality that I had thought to be.

And so there had to be something else had to come along to complete this, or did at least, whether it had to or not. I found that I had, and I had not particularly been troubled with this prior to being in Africa, that I had a very sarcastic tongue. Well, obviously, it wasn't the tongue that was sarcastic, it was the mind that was sarcastic, and the tongue that expressed the sarcasm.

So with a critical spirit, and a censorious mind, and a sarcastic tongue, you can imagine what a tremendously helpful impression I was making on my fellow missionaries. And I didn't like it, and they didn't like it, and I didn't like them for what they did, and they didn't like me for what I did. And here I was, seven years of training after high school to get ready to go to the mission field, living with people that desperately needed to know the Lord, and the whole thing is in danger of being robbed of its significance because of something that I was unable at the time to deal with effectively.

I can recall pressure building up and somebody pointing out some flaws in me, and I could see through them and knew their weak spot, the chink in their armor, and so when the pressure would get a little heavy, I'd wait for that opportune moment, you know, the silence in the group so everyone would hear it, and then like Zorro of old in the Black and White movie, you remember how he'd go zip, zip, and make a Z on the wall? Well, I would go zip, zip with my tongue and carve into their spirits a mark, a wound that would never heal, never heal. And I can recall so vividly the remorse and the grief and the heartache that this caused. The evidence that I to myself that I was a child of God was that I hated this thing, this criticism, this censoriousness, this sarcasm, this thing that was hurting my ministry for Christ on the mission field, and I can recall again and again going to my room, getting down before the Lord, beginning to pray and finding myself gritting my teeth and putting the fingernails into the palm of my hand, somehow as though if I powdered my teeth, rubbing them together and punctured the heel of my hand with my fingernails, I would convince God of how earnest I was in telling him that if he would forgive me once

more, if he would pardon me from this once more, if he'd let the blood of Christ cleanse me from this sin against my brother once more, that I would never do it again.

And then getting up after knowing that he had forgiven me and going to my brother or sister, as the case might be, asking them for their forgiveness, getting it verbally, knowing that the wound would remain, but the pressure would build and it would build and it would build, and situation would come, again, those quick, sharp, cutting, searing words, they say that a cut made with the edge of a piece of grass is one of the hardest to heal, because it's so smooth, there's no ends for the fibers to join, and a cut made in sarcasm is like that, it's a wound so hard to heal and open so easily again. Now, here's the problem. You say, well, why are you saying it? You were the only one like that in all of Africa, weren't you? Oh, I wish that that were the case.

The reason that I'm telling you about it is because I found it so typical, not of you, of course, but people otherwise and elsewhere who have problems within their minds and their personalities, within their reactions and their words. Oh, look what happened when we came to the Lord. He awakened us, remember step one.

He convicted us of the crime of sin. He brought us to repentance. We said, we're going to please you in everything.

He quickened faith. We were forgiven, we were pardoned, and now we're in the Christian life, and we're discovering things about ourselves that are robbing the Lord Jesus of glory, us of joy, and others of blessing. Well, it would be so easy if we could find some theology to condone it and accept it.

There are those who say, of course, as I came back on furlough and went to a pastor, and he said, brother, nobody's perfect. Everybody does this. You just have to get used to it.

But I went to the Scripture, and I didn't find the Scripture supporting him in that. The Scripture did not give to me any consolation. I found rather such a statement as in verse one of Romans 6. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? No! There wasn't any theological basis by which I could say this is right, this is normal.

Maybe it's average, but it's wrong. Maybe everybody, I went into one tribe in that period of time on the Sudan border, 98% had syphilis. They were venereally throughout the tribe.

The only reason we didn't say 100% was because we didn't see everyone in the village. But the medical report was 98% have venereal disease. Now, venereal disease was average, but it wasn't normal.

Do you understand? It was average, but it wasn't normal. You can't say average and normal are the same. And what I had in my attitude, in my expressions, in my words, was average.

And the preacher I went to see tried to tell me it was normal. But when I went to the Scripture, the Holy Ghost through the Word of God said it's not normal. You can't accept it.

You can't be content with it. Well, this good preacher hearing me out, telling me this was normal, and he said, you know, brother, I think what you need is a seminary training. You've had Bible school and Bible training, and I'm not decrying that, but I think that if you were to go to seminary, it would give you professional polish, and you wouldn't have some of these problems.

So I accepted this wisdom and matriculated at the seminary that he recommended. I went up to the city in Kentucky. I gave them my tuition money.

I bought their books. I went to the room they assigned. And the first night there, I looked at these books that I had purchased in the bookstore that day.

Half of them I'd read in the past and didn't have much value. And the other half, as I thumbed through them, I thought it's going to be a colossal waste of time for me to spend the next few months studying this rubbish. So the next day I dematriculated.

I couldn't get any money back for the books. I had to keep them. But I did make a deal.

They said, well, we're going to charge you one month's rent on the room. I said, then I'm going to stay in the room for one month. So I stayed in the room for that month, and I tried spiritual inventory.

I started to go through my experience from that day right on down. Day after day, I'd go through year after year. Year preceding, I'd go through that.

What was real? Where did I know what was real in my relationship to the Lord? Through my years in Africa, through my years in theological training and in college. Back and back and back. And I got frightened.

You know what I found? I found that my heart was a theological compost pit. You know what a compost pit is? You take the leaves and the greens and so on, off the cuttings, off the yard, and you pile it up. Now, they're perfectly good leaves when you gather them up, perfectly good cuttings, perfectly good grass.

But when you cut it from the source and you pile it up, something begins to happen to it. And that's what was happening to me. I had taken leaves out of men's books, out of their articles, out of their sermons, and I piled them on my heart.

And because I could trace the outline of the leaf and could count the blades of grass and could give the scriptures to support them both, I assumed that because I knew the words, I had the reality. But now I'm going through inventory, and you know what I'm discovering? I'm discovering that everything I've acquired in 18 years is nothing but leaves off of other men's trees. And I said, I'm going to be honest, if it's all like this, if it's all just words, all just theory, all just talk, then I'm going to admit it, I'm going to go right out and start over.

Well, I got down to 18 years previously, and that was the night I went to the altar at Old Red Rock Holiness Camp Meeting in South St. Paul, Minnesota, and God, in grace for the sake of His Son, cleansed my sin and brought me out of death into life and bore witness to my spirit that I had been born again. And now, after 18 years, I'm starting in where I had been 18 years previously. The only thing real in my Christian life at that time was that I had been forgiven.

I had been pardoned. I was a child of God. And I determined from that day on, I'm never going to make the mistake of thinking that because I know something with my intellect, I have experienced it in my heart.

I have to first know it in my intellect before I can experience it in my heart. In going back through those 18 years, I went through that senior year at Northwestern Bible College when Maude F. Groom taught a course in the Christian life. And what I'm about to tell you that so dramatically transformed my life, Maude

Groom had given us, and I went through my papers and found where I'd gotten an A in the course and didn't understand experientially one thing she was talking about.

If I had, I wouldn't have had the problem I had on the mission field. So here I am, Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. My month is up.

I'm leaving. The mission says, we want you to go to Clearwater, Florida on your way back to Lake Worth where my family was staying. We want you to represent us down there.

There's a conference and we have no missionaries other than yourself to represent us. Will you go? So I went. Arrived about 12 o'clock at night, driving from Louisville.

Got a room. They were expecting me. And the next morning after breakfast, I went to the first early morning Bible study.

Man speaking, main Bible teacher, never heard of him. Couldn't have been much. I'd never heard of him.

So I listened to him. And before the hour was over, I said, haha, that man knows the Bible. And then I heard him that night.

And I said, huh, that man knows the Lord. See, I had a little bit of sense enough to recognize reality in somebody else. And then I heard him the next morning and I said, that man knows me.

Now, that was the most embarrassing part of it because he stopped preaching and gone to meddling. He was getting awfully personal that second day. And that night, well, it was unbearable because there were only two people in the audience.

So it seemed to be him and me. And he was sitting there, standing there behind the desk and reaching his hand clear across the auditorium, had it four inches from the end of my nose. And he was telling everybody in that whole place all about me.

He was telling him all about my critical mind, all about my sensorious spirit, all about my sarcastic tongue, all about the people I'd hurt, all about the times I'd wept before the Lord for forgiveness. And God promised God if he'd forgive me, I'd never do it again and got up and tripped over my own personality and fell flat on my face. He told it all.

Oh, it was embarrassing because I was sure everybody knew who he was talking about. And then he said, you know what your trouble is? And I almost broke the silence of the meeting and said, yeah, I don't. But go ahead.

You said everything else. But I kept my mouth shut. And he held his finger right under my nose, wiggled it.

He said, your trouble is that when you came to the Lord, you got all you thought you needed. God gave you everything you believed for, but you didn't know how much you needed. He said, you thought all you needed was forgiveness and pardon and eternal life.

And God gave you what you asked for, forgiveness and pardon and eternal life. And you went in through the cross into the Christian life. But what's been happening since then? You said, well, there's the cross back there and there's the gates of heaven and I'm on my way to the gates of heaven and you've been falling over your own big feet every step of the way, stumbling, falling on your face, crawling up, asking

forgiveness, getting forgiveness, falling again over your attitudes, your disposition, your trait.

He said, when are you going to give up? What's the matter? Don't you realize what you've done? Said the preacher. Don't you see your problem? When you came to Christ, you thought that all he died for was what you had done. To get forgiveness for what you had done.

Didn't you realize that you were so ruined by sin that he didn't die just to save you from what you'd done? He died to save you from what you are. Now, what you need to do anyway, he didn't put it that way. He said, do you want to know what you need to do? And of course, I almost broke silence again.

Did you go ahead? What do I need to do? But I didn't. I held it, held my peace. He said, what you need to do is turn around and look at the cross from the inside.

You see, when you stood outside the cross, you saw Christ on the cross dying for you. And you received him as your representative, as your substitute, dying your death. You asked him to forgive you and pardon you, give you eternal life.

And he did. You went in through the cross into the Christian life. Now, you need to turn around, look at it from the inside.

Now, what will you see? Why? You're going to discover that there were two people on that cross. Christ was on the outside of it, dying for you. But since he was your representative on your cross, dying your death from God's attitude and his position in heaven, when he looked down, he didn't just see his son.

He saw you. He saw you. That was you dying there in the person of your representative.

Now, what you've got to do is realize that all these years since you were saved, there's been somebody on the inside of the cross. Look at him now. It looks empty, doesn't it? But it kind of resembles you.

Now, what I want you to do, said the speaker that night, is to go over and put the hands up on that cross, the hands of your heart, and say, Heavenly Father, from tonight on, as long as I live, I'm going to stay here on the back of the cross, crucified with Christ. That's going to help you understand that the day Christ died, you died. Now, he said, I don't want you to play dead.

I don't want you to think dead. I don't want you to act dead. I don't want you to talk dead.

I just want you to know that the day Christ died for you, you died with him. And to help you know it, I want you to go put the hands of your heart up, feel them slip onto the nails, ask God to bend the nails up so you can't get off. And from here, as long as you live, you're going to stay right here, crucified with Christ.

Now, he said, you want scripture, don't you? I said, I sure do. So he read the scripture we had read for us, Romans 6, 6, knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed. And henceforth, we should not serve sin.

Well, you know what it was to me? It was like being in an upstairs bedroom with a black curtain down, blackout curtains. You couldn't have any light. And you say it's midnight.

It's midnight. But you go and you raise that curtain and you find the bright sun shining and the whole room is flooded with light. That's what happened when I saw what he's talking about.

Just raise the curtain. Well, I went back to my room and I took a piece of their conference stationary in the little desk and I made a contract that you always got to put the date down, the time, the place. And I had to make a contract, you have to have those things.

And so I then said that I, that I am by nature from today on, as long as I live, I shall count to be crucified with Christ. That I, that I am by nature, the good and I had all the good parts I could think of and the bad, all the bad parts I could think of, that I, that, that I, that I am, that me crucified with Christ. And what happened? Sealed it, put it in an envelope and I still got it.

Still keep it. Next day, a new man come on the night before. He saw me there.

He didn't like me and I didn't blame him. No. And he didn't like my mission.

I didn't think that was all nice. He should have liked the mission even if he didn't like me. And he got me against a tree.

Got one hand here, another hand here. And he was blowing in my face and telling me everything wrong. I couldn't get away unless I slipped under his arm.

He had me pinned. And he said, now, read that book and tell me all about how wrong the mission was and how wrong I was. And you know something? For the first time in my life, instead of feeling that thing, boy, I'm going to give him, I'll get my short out and getting it sharp.

I'll tell him. Instead of that, it was like looking through the wrong end of binoculars at the stage. And there was something was happening, but it was happening to somebody else.

It was an element of distance. And I looked at him and I know I smile. I said, brother, you're just going to have to let me go.

You have to excuse me. A miracle has just happened and I got to get along with the Lord and thank him for it. Now he's gone in addition to everything else.

He said I'd lost my mind because he knew what he was expecting to get. And I went back just praising the Lord that for the first time in my life, there had been this release from the tyranny of my own personality, my own traits, myself. So if you can see and understand somebody that's lived for years into the tyranny of one's personality to find there's victory.

You say you've never had failure since then. Oh, wait a minute. Oh, wait one minute.

I didn't say anything like that. No, I didn't even say that. It's like this.

If you once find out how to have victory over the tyranny of your own traits and disposition, that's one battle. If you don't know where it is, it's pretty hopeless. The next battle is whether you want to take that victory or not.

Because there's sometimes when you say that guy, he needs a good telling off. And you know there's victory, but you don't take it because you just. So what I'm talking about now is how to have victory over your worst enemy.

That worst enemy is you. You see, in Romans 5, Christ died for us. In Romans 6, it's Christ died as us.

And in Romans 8, it's Christ in us. He not only died for you, but he died as you so he could live in you. That's the message.

Now, is there victory? Yes. Where? On the back of the cross, crucified with Christ. Let me close with this.

We had in New York while I was pastor there, two singers, Antone Marco and another one whose name will come to me in a moment. It was the other one who was at the First Presbyterian Church attending all the meetings. And he came, I gave him.

How many of you would like to enter into this victory? Come into the prayer room and I'll talk with you afterwards. And about 30 people came from the First Presbyterian Church, Flushing, New York. And I explained it to him again.

And they went home. And I said, now, before, before they left, I said, between now and tomorrow night, you're going to have an opportunity to reckon yourself to be dead in the sin. Well, that next night they came and I saw him as he came in the door.

Hello, brother. Oh, he was so happy. Such a delightful day.

So thrilled. Happy to be back to the meeting. And we, after the service, I said, I'd like everyone who was here last night with me in the room to come in tonight.

I want your testimonies and anyone else we'd like to pray with, we'll have you come too. And so I said, we went to this dear brother, looked at him. Now, he, I can't think of his name, but it's all right.

But he was an Anton Marko. And I looked at him now, I said, Brother Marko, would you please give us your testimony? Oh, his neck got red, his throat got red, his cheeks got red, his ears got red, his eyes red. One thing in this world he did not want is for someone to call him Anton Marko.

And then when he got up to his eyes, his crowd crawling red, he smiled. Well, he said two minutes to go and I couldn't make it. You told me that between last night and tonight in 24 hours, I would not have to reckon myself dead to have victory over my temperament traits.

And then he said, and the one thing I can't stand is for anyone to call me Anton Marko. Not that I got anything against him, but I'm not him. He said I missed it by two minutes, but he had victory.

He'd had victory because when it got up to about his eyes, Father, the part of me that would think this and feel this and react that way, that's the me that died the day Christ died. And the red started to go down and he could laugh a bit at himself and testify to the grace of God in his life. Your worst enemy, like mine, is you.

Mine is me. There is victory. Christ didn't die just to save us from hell.

He died to save us from ourselves. Our Heavenly Father, we come to thee this morning to thank thee and praise thee that before you sent your Son into the world, you knew everything we were going to need to be everything you want us to be. And you provided so great salvation, great salvation, not only forgiveness and pardon and cleansing from the sins of the past, but moment by moment victory over our worst enemy, ourselves, our traits, our habits, our attitudes, our disposition.

So Father, we would ask thee today that in the next hours, next few days, before we meet next Lord's Day, each of us will have had an opportunity to put the switch on and experience the flow of the resurrection life of Christ, giving us victory over ourselves. We ask it with thanksgiving in Jesus' name. Amen.

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