

Stages of Spiritual Development

by Todd Atkinson

Todd Atkinson's sermon explores the stages of spiritual development, emphasizing the cycles of growth, struggle, and the call to overcome through God's grace.

Duration: 53:22

Scripture: 1 John 2:12-14

Topics: "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher explores the theme of overcoming as a dominant theme throughout the Bible. He starts by referencing the story of Cain and Abel, highlighting the importance of offering our best to God. The preacher then discusses the recurring cycles of spiritual dissatisfaction and disconnect that we all experience. He emphasizes that God's grace initiates change in our lives and offers a way out of these cycles. The sermon concludes with the story of Jacob, who struggled with deception but ultimately overcame his past through an encounter with God.

Transcript

Just before we turn our attention to the scripture, just be conscious of, we are in a bit of a shift right now on some things. About four or five years ago, I felt like the Lord, I guess, whispered right into my heart that He was going to send us all kinds of people with real leadership giftings and qualities, and that we would only have them for so long, so implicit in that is use the time wisely, use it well, because the church in time would act like a springboard and those people would end up all over the world. I felt like after hearing that, the first of those two things seemed to really occur.

The most amazing people have come and are still coming, and some of you, I look out and I see you're them today and just getting to know you. And the second part, I would say until recently, I didn't see a lot of, for the five years while I was waiting on that word, I didn't hear many people ever say to me, hey Todd, get me ready, I'm going to the nations. So at times I think, did I hear that correctly? But I think more truer to the case is that it's a matter of timing, because as about November, it feels like the kind of sovereign hand of God has been stirring in people's hearts.

We've not been preaching on that, along that lines necessarily, or speaking on it, but numbers of our families have said in the last four months, God has called me to go to this nation, or that nation, or nations. I feel like we're meant to go as a family. We're not meant to go now, but we're meant to get ready to go now, will you help us get ready? And I realize that we need to take that very seriously, to realize it signals

something, something in God's plan, and something in God's timing.

And when those signals happen, you've got to get behind those, you have to recognize those. And so there's more to this story. For instance, the Alls family, Bill and Heather Allsden family, are one of those families.

So they're going on a mission trip with Pastor Allen here, but I just want you to know there's more to the story. They're actually going to investigate this country, they're going in an exploratory way to consider taking their entire family to move to a mission field. We have an upcoming trip, we leave in April, eight of us are going to Kenya.

You'll remember Daniel and Marlise Hoogteling were here from Kenya, they spent two months on a rest time here, and it was just great to have them. Now we're going to see them and to see their team. And as a church in Kenya, we feed 400 plus children a day.

So we go to see those children and check up on them and see what their needs are and how to keep up our commitment to them. Well, on that team, we likewise, we have the Schaefer family are coming with us, this time mom and dad, but they're, same thing, Marcus and Shane are coming on this trip to explore, to find out what is it like to live there, because they feel like, again, that the Lord is leading them. So I'll leave them to tell you the story, but Marcus was actually sitting in a service and had a full vision of a name come before him, and I'll leave him to tell you.

But he asked his wife, what does this word mean? She says, I think it's a country in Africa. Now there are countries like that in the world, aren't there? You don't always hear that much of it. So they've been looking into it, so they're preparing to go.

And there's numbers of other families whose names I won't yet mention, but at the same time preparing to go. So we're going to have a window of time to serve them well, to help get them ready, and to feel our love and support, and what are all the things that are going to have to be in place? And for some of you, it could be you, you're listening, going, okay, I've never told anybody this yet, but, you know, it could be that you feel like the Lord's getting you ready for the mission of your life, right here in Canada. And again, you know you've been sitting on something for years, it's just not, doesn't seem to have been the right time, it just doesn't feel like things have enabled that yet.

There hasn't been the kind of support around you, possibly, to make that possible. And so, but we think that come autumn here, there's numbers of things that are new initiatives right here to reach people in Lethbridge and area. So it's an exciting time, a time to take seriously, a time to rejoice in, a time to get ready for, and a time to walk with one another, and walk with one another in.

So you'll be hearing more about our upcoming Kenya trip, but I'd appreciate if you'd, when you think of it, you pray for that trip, pray for the eight of us that are going, there'll be another time we'll have commissioning. We still have one person who is still in need of funds, so if there's anyone who would like to give to that trip, or give to that person, then let us know. We just want all eight that want to go, we want to make sure that they're able to go.

Well, I'd like to turn my attention to God's Word now. The last number of weeks, I've been sharing my heart and speaking in terms of something called stepping stones of God speaking significant things, and doing significant things in our hearts that are like stepping stones in a garden that will bear the weight of

His doings, and bear the weight of His glory and presence in our lives. And a couple weeks ago, I was asking, Lord, what's the next stepping stone that you want to lay down? And I heard Pastor Alan Woodruff speak, and I said, you've got to do that at our services.

And so he spoke last Sunday, and Master, I've been around a lot of the world, and I've never heard that subject treated as well, and delivered as well as last week. Really enjoyed that. And so I want to kind of continue in that vein a little bit, and speak about the reoccurring cycles that happen in all of our lives, mine included, however you want to describe that cycle.

But I think that the cycle works a little bit like this, that all of us end up feeling at one time or another a little spiritually dissatisfied, spiritually withered, maybe a sense of spiritual disconnect. But then God in His grace begins to show us grace, and initiate toward us, and speak to our hearts, and show us that things could be different, put faith in our hearts to believe for a better day, and so hope begins to come into our hearts that it could actually be different. Next part of the cycle.

The next part of the cycle is then the fact that He's doing that on our hearts, initiating, showing us grace, and we're responding wholeheartedly back to that, means that we actually begin to see spiritual life come, and spiritual growth begins to occur, and something in our walk with Him begins to accelerate again, and we're really happy with that. So next part of the cycle. Next part of the cycle is that something in life will happen that will trigger an age-old area, an area that we've struggled with from time immemorial, we've prayed about, we've fasted about, we've asked people to minister to us, and for some reason it has this kind of staying power.

And because God has been speaking, and things have been happening, we kind of think it's gone, but it's not really gone, it's just the top of the dandelion's been broken off. So in other words, it's just the outward part, the surface part is gone, but the root hasn't been gone, and so up it comes again, and it's there in our life, and that brings us to decision time. What are we going to do when that familiar thing that has caused us some pain and discomfort for many years, as that begins to arise again, it's decision time.

What are we going to do with that? Do we want to go the way of all the new fresh stuff that God's doing in our life, or do we want to choose this old pattern again? Because if we choose it again, it'll suffocate out the new life. Remember that part of the cycle? So we kind of feel disconnected from God and people, God moves in our heart, faith rises and hope that it could be a better day, spiritual growth begins to happen again, and life begins to happen. This old thing happens, but if we choose it, it will cut short that life.

It's like the dandelions will come up again, and all the new growth, the new grass, it will suffocate that out. It will do war against all the new things that God is doing and saying, you know, it'll undermine all the last weeks and months of every good thing God is saying in your heart. And maybe even as bad as all that, because we have struggled with that thing so often, so frequently, now it's there again, and it'll cut our knees out from under us, and we will suffer a lack of confidence.

We think, oh, what's the use? There's something inside of us that just wants to throw up our hands. What's the use of struggling that? What's the use of this marriage? What's the use of hoping? What's the use? And even it will disconnect our outreach. We won't reach out to other people with the same level of care and confidence, because this inner struggle, unresolved, will rob us of the confidence that's required to do that.

Now, I feel that's a little unfair, because here we've been walking with Jesus all these years, and now just because I'm struggling with someone, I won't introduce someone to the gospel. I won't let them even begin their walk with Jesus, just because I'm struggling at some of this level up here. So whatever is happening with this, and whatever is happening with you, we have to be careful what we do with that, because it should never cause us to stop sharing the gospel with people and beginning their walk with him.

And so if it does, if it cuts out the wheels from under us, if it cuts out our legs, if it knocks the wind out of ourself, then we're back at the first part of the cycle, once again feeling spiritually withered, spiritually dissatisfied, and spiritually disconnected. And I don't know about you, but there's every part of me wants to say, I would sure like to break that cycle. Every part of me would like to say, I'm done with that.

Alan preached about Jacob, is that the cycle in his life was the cycle of, he was a usurper, he was a deceiver, he was a schemer to get his own way, but he reached a spot in his life where he said, I don't want to be in this cycle any longer. So even as a, as a, I wasn't even a Christian yet. My parents had come to faith.

I was 14, 15 years of age. I was at a party, had far too much to drink, and I'm embarrassed to say, and I remember being in a misdemeanor, which means I knock someone out because he was an older person and he was being rude to girls. And I was taught you shouldn't be rude to girls.

So unfortunately I hit him and, and then I was really embarrassed though when he did come to, he congratulated me on a good knockout. I did appreciate that. But in my embarrassment, I actually went where all brave men retreat to.

I went to the bathroom and I looked at myself in the mirror. I remember just saying, Atkinson, what are you doing? Because life felt out of control. I'm doing all the things.

I grew up in an alcoholic home. I swore to myself I would never go down this path. History was repeating itself in my very life.

I'm going down a path that I know, and I've seen its destruction, and I'm choosing it again. And that night in that bathroom, I remember feeling life feels like a gerbil's wheel. A gerbil wouldn't be my most favorite of creatures, maybe because I feel like one sometimes.

They just stumble into this wheel and then run like the dickens until they trip. The momentum will throw them out against the other side of the cage, and then they'll shake their head and climb right back in that jolly thing. And run and run and run until they trip.

The force will throw them out against the other side of the cage. Well, this night was one of those nights where I tripped up. I've had many trip-ups.

And I got thrown to the other side of the cage, and God was in my trip-up. Because I looked at that gerbil's wheel and said, do I really want to get back in? Do I want to do one more cycle around that thing? You know this is for you. You know you're here today for a reason.

The Lord loves you enough to speak to you and to me in a revelatory way. I said, I don't want back in that thing. It's brought nothing but destruction to my family.

And already my first years in it was bringing nothing but horrible stuff. And I made a decision. And I knew my parents had come to faith.

I knew something had to do with Jesus. Somehow I knew whatever he was about was better than getting back. And furthermore, I knew if I crawled in the wheel that night, guess when the next time I would choose? I knew that it would probably be 20 years.

I would just get spinning so fast out of control that it would be 20 years before I get my next chance to make a decision. And so I chose not to get back in the wheel that night. But there's all kinds of Christian wheels, not just pre-Christian wheels that we get locked into.

And there is a way out. There is a way out. And so I want to do a little bit of a survey this morning of one of a very dominant Bible theme.

It spans the whole of the Bible. It goes from Genesis right through to Revelation. And it's God's answer to break that cycle.

And it's summed up in one word, and that is overcoming. The word overcoming. And hopefully by the end of this, you'll know what I mean by that word.

Genesis chapter 4, first instance. Genesis chapter 4. Remember Cain and Abel? Remember Cain killed Abel? They both offered sacrifices to God. One offered an acceptable sacrifice, and the other offered an unacceptable sacrifice because one gave his best and one gave his least.

Right? So keep that in mind. It's full of truths, the Cain story. So because of that, Cain was angry, probably jealous, and likely discouraged because it says twice in the story his face fell.

So his body language was showing discouragement. What we don't know about the story or don't often recognize is that before he acted out of that anger, jealousy, and discouragement, God acted in such a way as to give him a way out. He killed Cain, but he did, or Abel, but he did not have to kill him.

On the eve before that terrible event, God intervened, came to Cain, spoke to him, and offered him a way out. And it's recorded in this verse. So this is God speaking.

God says to Cain, Cain, if you do well, or if you do right, another translation says, if you do what's right with your anger, you're angry, but you're gonna have to make some decisions. Do right with your anger. You're feeling jealousy, but if you do right with your jealousy, you're feeling terribly discouraged, but if you do well or make good decisions with your discouragement, will you not be accepted? But if you don't do well with your anger, if you don't make good decisions with your discouragement, sin is crouching at your door.

The Hebrew word for crouching is used of a beast of prey lying in wait. The picture is of a lion who's on the hunt, who's hunkered down in the tall grass, waiting for his moment of opportunity. And God says to Cain, sin is like that lion.

It's on the other side of the door. It's laying in wait for you. It's waiting for your moment.

It's moment of opportunity. In other words, don't open the door. It's on the other side of the door.

It's there. It's crouching. Its desire is for you.

It's to have you, to take you, to overcome you. Every one of us have been in those moments. And God is in those pre-sin moments saying, don't open the door.

Its desire is for you. But listen to what God says to Cain. This isn't just a word for the moment.

This is a word outlining Cain's destiny. You must rule over it. It wants to rule you.

If you choose well, you rule it. Sin is looking to overcome you. Your destiny is you're going to overcome it.

It's looking to master you. But your destiny is you're going to master it. It wants to have dominion over you.

But your destiny, Cain, is to have dominion over it. Before sin entered the world, mankind were supposed to have dominion over all creation. That's why God spoke in Genesis 1, says be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and have dominion.

That's before the fall. But do you know after sin entered the world, the call to rule, the call to have dominion is still the same. But now after sin entered the world, the call is to have dominion over sin and not let it have dominion over us.

So when my sin cycle comes around, when your sin cycle comes around, your pain cycle, our anger cycle, whatever your cycle is called, but when it comes around and it's crouching at the door, know that God is there whispering and saying your destiny, your destiny is to have dominion over the very thing, all your life, which has been seeking to have dominion over you. Let's turn to Genesis 32. We won't spend a long time here because Pastor Allen did such a fantastic job of speaking on Jacob.

Of course the key verse, then he said your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven, the NIV says you have struggled with God and have prevailed. Again, the NIV says you have struggled with God and have overcome. There's that word again.

You have struggled with God and have overcome. All his life, Jacob struggled with deceiving. If there was a chance to make the best of something, to turn something in his own direction, in his own favor, he would take that opportunity at any lengths.

But now his past is catching up with his present because he deceived Esau, his brother. Now Esau is making his way to him with 400 soldiers. His past is caught up to his present.

His cycle is caught up to him. The consequences of it are upon him. And so God comes to him that night in the form of a man.

I like how the story begins. It just says a man came. So I would say that probably at the end of the story, at the beginning of the story, Jacob thought this is probably just a guy.

This is a robber. This is a thief. Maybe Esau has sent one of his men ahead of him.

This is a man. But by the end of the story, he calls the place where he'd wrestled Peniel. He says, I've seen God face to face.

At the start of the story, he thinks this is a man. By the end of the story, he knows this is God. So how many of your wrestling matches have you been engaged with and only thought it's just a man? It's just me.

It's just me. It's just my weakness. It's just the way I made.

It's just my makeup. But now you're in the middle of the story and you realize there is something more to this. God is in this wrestling.

God is in this thing. This is, there's more significance to this wrestling match in your life than has met the eye. And so he was, he realizes that he will not let go of God because he realizes that if God is in this wrestling match, then the only way that he can be rid of his deceptive nature is by hanging on to God and not letting go.

I love the end of the story. You've, you've wrestled with God and have prevailed. Well, for years, I thought, how did he prevail? How did he win? Jacob went away limping.

God didn't go away limping. Well, because prevailing winning with God is hanging on and not letting go. Even when it hurts, remember God touched the hip of his socket.

It resulted in incredible pain. He still would not let go. So even when it hurts, you won't let go.

Even when God makes it hurt, even when God allows it to hurt, he would let not let go because he knew that the blessing that he required to overcome his Jacob nature, the only God could give that kind of blessing. Do you realize he wasn't even wrestling against his deceptive nature? He wasn't wrestling against sin. He was wrestling with God for the anointing to overcome sin for the blessing to overcome sin.

And I think we've spent much of our life. Every one of us have our areas, but I think we've spent much of our life saying, Lord, take it away. Lord, take it away.

I don't want this anymore. Take it away. Asking other people.

Yeah. Please pray for me that the Lord would take this away. And God instead is saying, I'm not going to let's wrestle for it.

So fathers and sons do it's part of our sonship. Let's wrestle for it. Let's wrestle this one out a little bit, because there's some things that are formed in us that only are formed through contending.

They're only a form through persisting through enduring through wrestling. And so you can say, Oh God, take it from me. But you would miss the opportunity of a lifetime to become the person God wanted you to be.

He was called Jacob. He was later called Israel. It means he who struggles with God.

So it's not just that God took away some bad thing in his life. It was a wrestling match that God used to release his destiny. He was always meant to be Israel.

This was his calling. And there's things of your destiny and my destiny that are hanging in the balances. The problem is because these things are so familiar, they've been with us for so long that instead of wrestling against them, we excuse them.

I say, well, it's just me. Well, I say that because it's been me for so long. Or we go, Oh, it's just part of my personality.

It's just part of my makeup. Many, many years ago, I had a young guy from, of course, you know, most of my ministry was in the United Kingdom. And I had a young man come from the United Kingdom to train

with me.

And he was really young and had an extremely sarcastic sense of humor. So in Canada, they just didn't get that. And he was leaving a trail of damage everywhere he went.

So finally, I said to him, listen, your sarcasm is so biting. People don't really get that here. You're going to have to cut that out.

He said, no, it's just, it's just part of my national identity. Well, then I said, your national identity is full of sin. Like that's a sinful part of your identity.

So for him, he's always excused it, regardless of how much pain it caused people. Because it's just part of being me. How many times have we done that? We think, well, maybe it's just my thorn in the flesh.

Maybe it's just what I got to cope with. Or maybe it's just because of the family I come from. Or maybe it's just because of the country I come from.

And so if we excuse it and justify it, then we'll never wrestle with it. We'll never seek to overcome it. I've, I've just had a brilliant last couple of weeks.

I felt the Lord saying this to my heart. Then to hear Alan preach it, to be able to hear a couple of weeks in a row. So the last weeks, I've just spent days and go when I like Jacob wrestled at night.

And I, so I've, I've been using the night hours and just walking until I can't even like walk anymore without falling asleep. And I'm really like believing this and really pressing. I have just had the most wonderful two weeks because I realized this message is something the Lord has been trying to say to me for my entire Christian life.

But I just keep saying, Oh Lord, take that attitude away. Oh Lord, take this away. Oh Lord, deliver me from that.

And I didn't understand that. It's like, son, come wrestle with me, persist with me on this. And it's a message which can be quite counter-cultural just in case you think overcoming is solely an old Testament theme.

Well, guess what our Lord did himself 40 days before ever going into ministry 40 days wrestling with the devil 40 days fighting there before he said the spirit of the Lord is upon me. I want us to take a look at first John chapter two. This is a, just a fascinating passage.

It talks about three categories, little children, young men, and fathers. I think as you'll read it, you'll realize it's meant figuratively, not literally. It's not meant to be age specific or gender specific.

It's talking about three distinct stages of spiritual development. Okay. Can I say that again? It's talking about three distinctive stages of spiritual development.

And you'll see there's lots of evidence within the whole book, the whole epistle to help align that because the things that are said about little children are really talking about new believers. Whether someone is young or old in the faith, age regardless. So let's take a look through it and then we'll come back to it.

I'm writing to you little children because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I'm writing to you fathers because you know him who's from the beginning. I'm writing to you young men because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you children because you know the father. And I write to you fathers because you know him who is from the beginning. So there's two refrains using these three ages.

I write to you young men because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you've overcome the evil one. Now let's go back to the first slide there, verse 12 and 13. I think if you'll look through these texts, you'll realize this isn't talking about three different natural age groups.

It's talking about three stages of spiritual development. Now when we think in those terms, one of the places our mind might want to go to is, oh I wonder which one I fit in. Am I in the little children's spiritual infancy? Am I in the young men's spiritual adolescence? Or am I in the father's spiritual maturity? And the truth is there's probably one part of us that is still in spiritual infancy.

There's probably some other parts of us that are really growing up and they're in the spiritual adolescence stage. And there's some parts of all of you that are in the spiritual maturity stage. So the real question is, what is God speaking to us about today? Those parts of us that have been in infancy because we don't want to go through adolescence and come through to maturity.

So let's take a look briefly at the three stages. So what characterizes spiritual infancy? I'm writing to you little children because your sins are forgiven. So number one, we will never grow anywhere spiritually.

We will never go to spiritual maturity if we cannot gain or ascertain the basics of the Christian faith, and that is our sins are forgiven. So think about your own life and story. If today you still feel guilt and shame over sins that were committed a year ago, two years ago, five years ago, 20 years ago, even though you've confessed those sins and repented of those sins and not continued to them, if you're still feeling guilt and shame today, that part of your heart and mind is still in spiritual infancy.

You understand? We've never grown up in that area because the problem isn't on God's side. Forgiveness is absolutely there. It's absolutely available.

But if I'm still struggling to believe it and to lay hold of it, then that part of me is still in spiritual infancy. It says because your sins are forgiven for his namesake. So when God acts in my life, why does he do it? When God wants to forgive my sin, when God wants to do anything in my life, this is a fundamental truth in Christianity.

He does it for his namesake. He does it for Jesus' namesake. He doesn't do it because of my conduct.

He doesn't do it because of my performance or how excellent I am. He forgives me because of something that Jesus did for me. So if we haven't understood that the basis of our faith is not what I do for Jesus, but that the basis is what he's done for me, that part of us is still in spiritual infancy.

We still haven't grown up, and that's why that part of us is never growing to spiritual maturity. Second group, I'm writing to you fathers because you've, sorry, that makes me up a little bit. Verse, no, this first text, sorry, verse 12 and 13.

I'm writing to you fathers because you know him who's from the beginning. So what characterizes a father? Well, number one, it's a deep knowledge of God. Spiritual maturity are people who understand that Jesus has been one that's been around from the beginning.

These are probably people that have been around since the beginning of the church. They've had a long, seasoned walk with God that has led them to a place of a personal, first-hand, intimate knowledge of God. Okay? Now there's a reason why he mixes up the order here.

Guess what lies between spiritual infancy and spiritual maturity? Guess what lies between the two? Spiritual adolescence, and what characterizes spiritual adolescence? How do you grow from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity? You've got to overcome something. The key word I write to young men, those in that stage of development, because you've overcome the evil one. There's something you've had to fight against.

There's something you've had to persist in. You've had to stay with. You've had to stick it with.

You've persevered in the face of it. You have, and you've overcome, like Jacob overcame, like, like, um, like many of the figures in the Old Testament were called to overcome. You have overcome the evil one.

I write, and then he goes on, does the exact same refrain. Again, I write to you, children. We've moved on.

Okay? I write to you, fathers. I write to you, young men, because you're strong. And the Word of God abides in you.

See, there's a connection between strong and the Word of God abiding in your hearts, and you've overcome the evil one. So that cycle, let's go back to the cycle. You know why there's that cycle? Because every time I come around to that issue in my life, I have personally failed to realize that God was inviting me to wrestle with Him and to receive a blessing to overcome that.

I've just said, Lord, take it away. Lord, deliver me from this. Lord, I don't want to have anything to do with this hard attitude ever again.

And the Lord was saying, I want you to learn how to overcome this. So which area is the Lord saying that to you? I want you to think of your cycle, and what it looks like yours, and what is it, then in a cyclical way, continues to come up in your life. I'll tell you one of the reasons why I feel that the Lord laying this on our heart as a church is because I feel like He has so much to us, and there's so much that He wants to give us in these next months.

But He knows that if we receive this, that it's only going to take a matter of time before our issues come up, the things that cut short the last move of God, and the things that suffocated the last Word of God. And He knows that He's going to pour stuff out, our issues will come up, and they have the power and the potential to suffocate the life out of what God is going to pour out, and to grieve the Holy Spirit. And I feel like He's being a bit preemptive, and wanting us to really let Him go down to the very root level in our heart, and to root out those things.

One more text of Scripture, the book of Revelation. I said that this was a theme that spanned the whole of the Bible. It goes right from Genesis to Revelation.

I started with Genesis, so let's end with Revelation. The book of Revelation is probably the strongest part of the whole Bible on this message. You'll remember with me how that the first few chapters of the book of Revelation, Jesus writes seven letters to seven first century churches in Asia Minor.

And the churches are really different. They've got different strengths, they've got different weaknesses, they've got different opportunities, they've got different promises, they've got different destinies. But there is one thing that is common to every single one of those.

And do you know what that is? The one thing Jesus says to every one of those churches is these words, to him who overcomes. Now what they have to overcome is radically different. But if you overcome, He says to the church, I will give you, and then the most amazing promises follow, the I will give you, the other side of overcoming.

So you'll take a look, Ephesus, had abandoned their first love. Remember he tells them to return. So what do they got to overcome? There's a state of lovelessness, of having abandoned their first love, their heart, they've lost their love for Jesus.

And he actually says he wants to overcome that state. Smyrna were suffering persecution. Pergamum were suffering false teaching.

Thyatira, a self-appointed prophet. Sardis, suffering spiritual deadness. Philadelphia were also suffering persecution.

And Laodicea, lukewarmness. Let's just take one as an example, Thyatira. Revelation chapter 2. It begins, to the angel of the church, or to the messenger of the church in Thyatira, write these words.

These are the words of the Son of God. In other words, you should probably pay attention to this. When Jesus writes you a letter, you should probably receive it with some respect.

So if you open up a letter and it says, these are the words of the Son of God, and you actually think it really is, you probably want to read that one carefully. His eyes are like blazing fire. So just in case you think Jesus is going to misdiagnose you, or he doesn't really understand you properly.

You know how we go in life, nobody understands me properly. Well, guess what? He does. His eyes are like blazing fire.

There's nothing about me he doesn't see. And his feet are like burnished bronze. His perspective of me is pure.

What he says to me is absolutely pure. Listen to all the wonderful things he says about this church. I know your deeds.

You do a lot of good things. And your love. You guys are a real loving church.

And faith. When it comes to faith, you guys are willing to believe me for anything. And service.

You're real servants in this church at Thyatira. Good job. You really got my message on serving well.

And perseverance. You really stick to things when other people have given up and went home. You're a real persevering church.

He says this, I know that you're doing more now than at first. Most people still start strong and finish weak. But Jesus says here's a church that starts strong and finished even stronger.

So on all these accounts, they're doing better than they were in the early days. That's a great testimony as a church. I mean, it's a little scary.

I mean, if he was to write us as a church, I hope he'd have a few nice things to say. He has a lot of wonderful things to say about this church. Next slide.

But then he has this word. Nevertheless. Have you ever had a nevertheless conversations with the Lord? All these wonderful things to say about you.

And then he says, well, nevertheless, there's a little something I'd like to talk with you about. Part of having a good relationship with Jesus is hearing all the complimentary things he wants to say to you and sticking around to hear the nevertheless. I didn't hear a single amen.

Listen to me. Part of having a relationship with Jesus as integrity is not just sticking around to hear all the nice things he says about you, but also listening when he says, nevertheless, there's a little something I'd like to talk with you about. Usually, we're just there for the first part.

And then we're like, it's getting a little long. I think I'm disappearing. I got to pick up the kids.

The roast is burning. And we really don't want to hear the nevertheless. Nevertheless, I'd like to challenge you on one point.

There's something I got against you. And now in this church, it says you tolerate that woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. You don't call yourself a prophet or prophetess.

Other people call you. So first problem is the problem of being self-appointing. By her teaching, she misleads.

She considers herself a leader, but she actually is misleading. My servants into sexual immorality, these words that she says that she calls prophecy are not leading people into a pure place. They're leading people into an impure place and into the eating of food sacrifice to idols.

Acts 15, all the apostles and leaders of the first century church convened into a conference called the Jerusalem Conference. And one of the things they agreed on unilaterally to be able to help Jew Gentile relationships in the early church was that they wouldn't need food sacrifice to idols. So this woman says it doesn't matter what all those guys say at the Jerusalem Conference, the apostles, leaders in the church, and she's teaching exact opposite of what the leaders were teaching.

Serious problem. Listen to this. I've given her time.

I mean, you think Jesus, you know, he's just so gracious. Even in this case, I've given her time. I've given her time to repent.

He's tried to woo her heart. He's tried to show her the error of her ways, but she is unwilling to repent. There's a hardness and a stubbornness to heart.

She just says, no way, I won't repent. Okay. Go to the verse 24.

So now he turns his attention to the rest of the church. To the rest of you, I say, to those of you who do not hold to her teaching, have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets. So what she was saying is I'm teaching the deep secrets.

Everybody else teaches superficially, even the apostles, but I'm teaching you the deep things. So that was her way of smuggling in a whole bunch of bad teaching. And so Jesus said, actually, if they're deep secrets, they're Satan's secrets.

Don't have anything to do with them. So this is his message to the church. Hold on to what you have until I come.

And to him who overcomes. Now, you can't just pluck that phrase out. This church was suffering a major challenge and that's what they were being called to overcome to him who overcomes.

It doesn't mean just overcome this woman in her teaching. But the fact is that teaching like this will always have an alluring effect on our soul, on our fleshly nature. If someone comes along and tells me, guess what? You can get away with all this stuff.

And the Lord doesn't mind sexual immorality. And you can go against where everybody else says is appealing to all the wrong sides of me. All the parts of me that should be crucifying those words will resurrect those very besides.

And so it's not just that they had to overcome this false teaching. What they had to overcome was the battle within to heed that false teaching. And listen.

So here's the message from beginning of revelation of Genesis to revelation overcome. If you overcome, I will give you. Now, what's Jesus going to give this church if they overcome authority over the nations? Now, listen to this.

You overcome fire. You overcome Jezebel and her false teaching. And you're going to get authority over the nations.

Do you realize over? It tells me this. Overcoming is obviously more important to Jesus than it is to me, because look at what he's going to give them. I'll give you authority in the nation.

You're just a little church in Asia minor. But if you overcome this, I will make you a major player in the world. I'll give you authority over the nations of the world.

Your influence as a church will become global if you overcome this local battle. So what is the Lord asking you to overcome that if you overcome the ramifications of it and you will overcome because it's your destiny? We are overcomers. We just haven't learned to recognize that side of who we are.

If you do it, the Lord says, I'll tell you, the world will feel the ripple effects. I will give you authority over the nations, the rest of the text. So this is a quote from Genesis 49 prophecy over Judah.

He will rule them with an iron scepter. A scepter is a instrument of ruling authority. So if you overcome this local battle, Jesus says, I'll actually give you rulership.

He will dash into pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my father. How did Jesus receive authority? When did he say all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me after what?

After overcoming on the cross. Just as I received authority from my father, I will also give him the morning star.

I'd love to have a really great interpretation for that. I don't even know what that means. So I asked Pastor Bill between the services.

So he said, because I'm like, I don't even know what I've studied. I've read interpretations and commentaries. None of them were that special.

He says the morning star is that when you wake up in the morning, there's that one star that's brightest in the sky. It's still visible. So probably God will give you, what did you say? Elevation? Ask him afterwards.

A place of profile, of standing? Ask him. He knows all the deep ones. Him and Alan Woodruff.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church. So what was the Spirit saying to this church? Overcome. Anybody that had an ear, not everybody on that ear would have an ear to hear.

Many of them would have just went home and said, that was a nice letter, Jesus. But anyone that had an ear, that actually cared about what Jesus was saying, and would listen to what the Spirit was saying to the church, you know what they'd hear? The Spirit said, overcome. Overcome.

Overcome. Don't be passive. There's no such thing as a passive battle.

Overcome. Don't just say, oh, it's just me. Overcome.

Don't just excuse it and justify it. Overcome. Overcome.

You can do it. Overcome. Jesus said, be of good cheer.

I've overcome. Why does his overcoming make me of good cheer? Because he overcome I can. Be of good cheer.

I've overcome. In other words, I don't even have to face this area of my life with trepidation and fear. I can be of good cheer.

Because he's overcome this already. And if I can press into him, and if you can press into him and say, Lord, you already beat this one. How about you teach me how to do it now? How about just like Jacob wrestled with a blessing? You bless me to overcome this thing.

You anoint me to overcome this. You give me your spirit to overcome this. Because we've been trying to defeat it in our own will.

We've been trying to defeat it out of our own determination. We get everybody we know to pray for us. We're doing everything we know in our spiritual repertoire.

And it's not going. Because the real secret is, how about I anoint you to? I love the way Alan portrayed that last week. Like Jacob was desperate.

So I asked myself afterward, what would a desperate man look like? For me, that's fasting. I really like fasting because I used to go crazy with fasting. I used to fast until my clothes wouldn't even stay on.

No, literally my wedding ring, I had to get different rings because I'd pray and my ring would fly off. I fasted for a week, for a whole year. I fast for a week, eat for a week, fast for a week.

And eventually I lost sight of the whole thing, what I was doing. So ever since, I'm like, what was that all about? So I'm not a great faster. But when he said, you've got to be a bit desperate here.

I was like, well, I think I know what that would look like for me. It's not up for me to tell you what it would look like for you. But you've got to ask yourself, do I want that thing sticking around for another 20 years? Do I want to live under the dominion of that, under the control of that? Do I want to live another 20 years with that thing overcoming me? Or is this time that there is grace coming from heaven, if I'll receive it, and I can overcome it? I can overcome it.

I believe that to be the case. If we all did that, for some of you, your destiny has been hanging in the balance for years. There's things that you've wanted to do for years, and you don't know why it's taken so long and it's not happening.

Now you've almost given up on it. Time to wrestle. Time to go meet with God, until he gives you the blessing to overcome that thing, and not to stop short.

And your name, too, will be changed. Let's pray.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28730.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/todd-atkinson/stages-of-spiritual-development/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net