

# Two Levels of Faith in the Christian Life

by Zac Poonen

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**Scripture:** Revelation 2:7, James 1:2, 1 John 5:4, Romans 5:3, Colossians 4:6, John 16:33, Revelation 21:7

**Topics:** "Overcoming Trials", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

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## Transcript

If you turn with me to Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3, we're familiar with the message the Lord gave to the seven churches. The churches were all believers. Nominal Christians were not found in those early days.

Nominal Christians came after persecution stopped. Wherever there's persecution of Christians, there won't be any nominal Christians, because what do they gain? So, these churches had believers, but many of them were not wholehearted believers. They had accepted the Lord and they were born again.

And so, the Lord says these words to each of the seven churches. First of all, in Revelation 2 verse 7, to him who overcomes. Now, if everybody was an overcomer there, there's no point the Lord saying that.

There's a special reward he gives to the one who overcomes. That's in the church in Ephesus, Revelation chapter 2. Now, we go to the next church, which is the church in Smyrna, chapter 2 verse 8. This is a good church, and they've gone through a tribulation, and they've been faithful, and we don't see anything bad or wrong that the Lord corrects in this church. But even then, he says in verse 11, to him who overcomes.

So, even in a good church, everybody was not an overcomer. And then you find the church in Pergamos, which also had some defects in it. Verse 17, to him who overcomes.

And then the church in Thyatira, where actually the elder's wife was running the church. If you read in verse 20, that is in a pretty bad state. And to them also, verse 26, to him who overcomes.

And then we go to the fifth church, Sardis, chapter 3 verse 1, which is a really bad state. They had a name that they were alive, the elder, verse 1, but he was dead. To them also, verse 5, him who overcomes.

And then we go to the church in Philadelphia, which is probably the best church. You know, the Lord says some wonderful things about them. He says, I'll make you a pillar.

But who is that? Verse 12, he who overcomes. So, even to a good church, he doesn't say all of you are going to be pillars. He says, in your church, those who overcome, I will make them a pillar in the temple of my God, and I'll write my new name upon him.

And then the last church, which is the worst, Laodicean church. To them also, he says in verse 21, he who overcomes. So, when we read that to the good churches and the bad churches, the Lord says, you must be an overcomer.

So, the great danger of sitting in a good church is that we can think, because we have good fellowship, and all the believers are good to us, and we have a good relationship with everyone. There's no conflict or strife. We can think everything's okay.

But remember, even to the good church, the Lord says, I want to see who overcomes here. Because that's an individual thing. He who overcomes means each individual.

It's possible for a husband to overcome, and the wife may not be an overcomer, or vice versa. And then when you come to the end of the book of Revelation, you read in Revelation 21. See, this was Revelation 21, and verse 7. He who overcomes will inherit all these things that are mentioned in this book, and I will be his God, and he will be my son.

And so, we find in the New Testament, there are two levels at which we can live the Christian life. And you see that not only in Revelation. In Revelation, there were these believers who were members of the church, and in the midst, there were those who were overcomers.

So our aim, we're not here to classify in a church who's an overcomer and who's not. That's not our business. That's God's business, which he'll take care of in the final day.

But we have to make sure that in our own heart, we have a real desire to be overcomers, to be in that number that the Lord's looking for. And if you turn to the earlier books in the New Testament, you find Jesus emphasizing this too. He turns, for example, to John's Gospel, chapter 10.

In John 10, Jesus says in verse, John chapter 10 and verse 10, in the middle of that verse, I have come that you might have life, and that you might have abundant life. So you see the two levels there again? There's life, and there's abundant life. To use an illustration, if you think of a person lying in a hospital bed, he's not dead.

He's got life. And compare him with someone who's playing in a basketball game or something, running around. That person's got fullness of life, abundant life.

If you only think of life, both are alive. But there's a lot of difference between that sick person who can hardly get up and this person who's so active, running around and playing games. In the Christian life also,

there are these two levels.

And throughout the New Testament, you find this challenge to press on to abundant life, to be an overcomer, and never to be satisfied with, I've got life. Because Jesus came not only to give us life, but abundant life. Now turn to the Epistles, 1 Corinthians, for example, what Paul writes to the Corinthians.

You see something very similar. In fact, you see this throughout the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians and chapter 3, 1 Corinthians 3, he's telling the Corinthian Christians, I could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to carnal men.

They're not unbelievers. They are infants in Christ. They are babies, not grown up.

And so he says, you're not spiritual. You're carnal or soulish. And you're an infant when you should have grown up.

And therefore, I gave you milk to drink and not solid food. You know, a baby can't eat solid food. So a newborn baby just wants milk.

So in God's word also, there's milk and there's solid food. There are some people when you go into a deeper study of God's word, you know, so well, I'm not interested in all that. I just trust Jesus.

And they think that's a very spiritual attitude to have. On the contrary, they are indicating that I'm a newborn baby and I want to remain a newborn baby all my life. Those are the type of Corinthian Christians.

They have so many problems in their life because they didn't think of growing up from babyhood. And Paul tells them that. And he says one evidence of this babyhood in verse 3 is there's jealousy.

See, if you are jealous of somebody else, another believer, or anyone else, a non-believer, jealous of anything, maybe that he's financially better off or he's got a better house or a better car or a better job, or spiritually, that he's more spiritually minded or that he's got more ability to preach God's word or that he's more respected in the church. There are all types of things that can cause jealousy. And jealousy, love is never jealous.

We have numerous examples in the world of parents who could never afford to go to college, who were just working with their hands, poor people, but their children, they send their children to college and the children get more qualified than them. I've never seen a parent jealous of his son or daughter going to college and getting more qualified than him. Why is that? Even though that son or daughter knows much more than the parents, no father or mother is jealous.

Why? Because love is never jealous. No parent is ever jealous if his son or daughter excels in some area where he himself could not excel. Love is never jealous.

So when you are jealous of someone, not only does it prove, as it says here, you're still fleshly, 1 Corinthians 3, you're at the low level, you're a baby, but it also proves that you don't love that person. As I said, compare your attitude to that person, to the love of a parent, to the child, where there's real love. So an infant is one who is still jealous, and not only jealous, it says in verse 3, there's strife.

Whenever there's conflict, it's an indication of babyhood. You know, our children, small children, the smaller they are, the more they fight and quarrel for little, little things, for absolutely unimportant things.

They'll fight about it.

So fighting with each other is another mark of babyhood. If a husband and wife are quarreling, it's a mark of babyhood. I'm not saying they're not Christians.

Paul didn't say you guys are not Christians. He says you're Christians, all right, but you don't seem to have grown up. And so I can't share with you some of the wonderful things in God's Word.

Now some of us, you know, have been in RLCF for quite a while. You've heard numerous messages from Scripture which are at a very high level, but it's not a question of hearing those things. How much do they register within you? If it doesn't register within you, it's almost as good as not having heard it.

See, for example, in studying math in school, mathematics, if the teacher is explaining multiplication and you've stood, you sat there, and you heard this wonderful teaching on multiplication and everybody seems to have understood it. You also seem to have understood it. When the teacher explained it, it was clear.

Maybe the teacher explained it on a board and you saw it and it was clear. But then when the teacher gives you a problem to solve, a mathematical multiplication problem, you can't do it. So that proves you didn't understand it.

A lot of listening to messages is like that. At the time when you're listening, you think, oh yeah, I got it. Boy, that was a very challenging message.

But when the time comes in the future days to apply it, it doesn't seem to work. That means you didn't understand it. So these Corinthians were like that and they were not growing up and there were many things that Paul could not tell them.

See, for example, in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 6, there are many people who... Chapter 2, verse 2, first of all, I determine not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Now, I've heard some people say, well, that's the only thing I want to know, Christ and Him crucified. And they think that is a spiritual thing to say.

It isn't. What Paul is saying is, I can't tell you anything more than the fact that Jesus died on the cross. It's about all you know.

Christ and Him crucified, that's all you know. He says, I could not share with you the more mature things. Verse 6, the wisdom which I can share with mature people, I could not share with you.

So it's quite likely there are a lot of things in scripture which the Lord wants to show us, which affects our life. It's not just a question of head knowledge. I've seen a lot of people who, because they hear so many messages and they watch me on YouTube, they understand so many things, and if their mind is clever, they can understand it so well that they can even preach it to somebody else.

But it isn't true in their life. You can preach about being free from anxiety, even though you're not free from anxiety yourself. Now, it's not only the Corinthians.

I want to show you another example. In Hebrews chapter 5, you see this is pretty universal in the first century, that there were people in churches where the apostles themselves were preaching who didn't seem to grow to become overcomers. In Hebrews chapter 5, he says, the time has come, verse 12, Hebrews 5, verse 12.

The time has come. By now you should have become teachers, but I find that you're still at this level where somebody has to teach you even the simple principles, the elementary principles means the kindergarten lessons of the word of God. He's saying, you Christians and these Hebrew Christians, you've been Christians for so long, and you should have been teaching others by now, but you're still in the kindergarten.

It's like saying, hey, you've been going to school for 15 years. By this time, you could have been a teacher, at least in the kindergarten class, because you're 21 years old now. You've been going to school for 15 years, but sad to say, you're still in the kindergarten.

You're still trying to figure out how addition works and subtraction and how to spell simple words. You're in the kindergarten, even though you're 21 years old. Now, any father or mother would be terribly grieved if their child is like that, even if your child is 12 years old and still in the kindergarten.

You'd be disturbed if your child is two years in the kindergarten instead of one year. Why is it that many Christians don't apply the same rule to their Christian life? Am I in the same level? I don't mean in understanding. Understanding, we can know so many things.

I'm talking in the level of our life. The level of our life is determined by whether we overcome sin, whether we overcome the lusts of the flesh, whether we overcome pride, whether we overcome the temptation that comes from the sinful pleasures in this world. Are we still drawn to them? Do you yield to them? To be tempted by them is okay, but do you yield to them? Then you're not an overcomer.

Well, if you're a newly born again baby, it's okay, understandable. But if you've been born again some years ago, there should be a progress. He says the time has come, Hebrews 5, 12, when you should have been teachers, and you're not able to eat solid food, verse 12.

So you still need milk. And then listen to verse 13. What is the definition of those who are still drinking milk, spiritually speaking? Everyone who partakes only of milk, Hebrews 5, 13, is not accustomed, that means not able to handle the word of righteousness.

It's solid food, you know. You can't put solid food in the mouth of a two-week-old baby. A two-week-old baby can only drink milk.

It'll choke if you put some solid food into its mouth. So there are two pictures he uses. One is of children who are in the same level at kindergarten, and the other is of a baby who's not able to eat solid food.

And what is this solid food? The solid food is described in verse 13 as the word of righteousness, the word of partaking of God's own nature of holiness and love and humility. The life of Christ, the nature of Christ, becoming more and more in us. It's not knowledge.

A person can have so much knowledge in his mind of Scripture, and even teach it, and still be a baby spiritually. I've heard a lot of preachers, pastors, who've been pastors for years, but look at their life. They're babies.

They still yell at their wives, and they love money, and those are all marks of babies. But they preach so much, and Christians who don't have discernment listen to these men and say, wow, what a wonderful message. It hasn't made them grow.

They just admire one sermon after another. You've got to be very careful, dear brothers and sisters, that you don't become a sermon taster. You taste different sermons and say, wow, that is a great message.

You need to evaluate yourself and see how much effect is that sermon having in your life. Otherwise, you're only accumulating in knowledge. It's like food, you know.

It's good to eat food. To use another illustration, if the food we eat does not get digested, and it's not converted into muscle, and blood, and flesh, and bones, you might as well not eat. If you're going to eat, and it's not getting digested, you throw it up, then it's as good as not eating.

So the person who has accumulated a lot of knowledge, and that knowledge, digestion, means that knowledge is not converted into life. That's the meaning of digestion, spiritually. It's like the food you eat gets digested and becomes blood, flesh, bones, and that's how children grow.

But if it's not digested, not converted into something that makes you grow, then it's useless. So this is what is happening to the early Christians. They were not interested in overcoming life.

They had life, but they didn't want abundant life. In the Old Testament, there's a picture of this, that about two million people, Israelites, left Egypt. 600,000 men, many women and children, a total of two million.

But out of those two million people, only two entered the land of Canaan. They all came out of Egypt. They put the blood on the door, and that's a picture of being redeemed by the blood.

They all went through the baptism of the Red Sea. That's a picture of water baptism. The pillar of cloud coming down from above is a picture of the baptism in the Holy Spirit that led them.

They experienced all that. They even experienced answers to prayer. Sometimes we think that if we get answers to prayer, we must be spiritual.

No. The people who experienced them, you know, in the Bible you read about some people who experienced one miracle. They were lame, and they started to walk.

Or they were blind, and they could see. Or they were demon-possessed, and the demons were cast out. Or they were dead, and they rose up.

One miracle they can testify to. But do you know what the 600,000 men who came out of Egypt could testify to? They'd say, if they were giving a testimony in your church, they would say, you know, brothers and sisters, we got our bread from heaven every morning. I mean, if you got bread from heaven, you'd probably be talking about it for the next 20 years.

They've got bread from heaven not just one day. Every single day for 40 years. Isn't that a fantastic miracle? You read in the Psalms, Psalm 105 and 106, that their clothes never wore out for 40 years.

Their sandals, with which they walked in the desert, never wore out for 40 years. If snakes bit them, they'd be supernaturally healed. When they were thirsty, water would flow out from a rock for 40 years.

Their entire 40 years was a daily miracle. But they never entered Canaan. Were they redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Yes.

Were they baptized in the Red Sea? Yes. But was God happy with them? No. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

I told you, it's the Corinthian Christians to whom Paul wrote, some of you are carnal. You're not overcomers. You're not becoming spiritual.

And I can't speak to you like spiritual people. And then he not only told them about that jealousy and strife which indicated they were babies, and they could only drink milk. He gives them an example from the Old Testament.

He said, 1 Corinthians 10 verse 1. He says, my dear believers in Corinth, let me tell you something. I don't want you to be ignorant of this. That all those Jewish people came from Egypt.

Verse 2, they were baptized into Moses. In the sea, a picture of water baptism. In the cloud, a picture of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

They ate the same spiritual food, which is a picture of going to church and listening to the same message. They all drank the same spiritual drink. They had received the Holy Spirit.

But, verse 5, with most of them, God was not happy. Why is he telling the Corinthian Christians this? He says, you also may be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. And you may be baptized, and you may have experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

You may be reading God's word. But, verse 5, may be true of you, that God's not happy with you. And so they died in the wilderness.

It's the minority with whom God is happy. Two out of 600,000 men, Joshua and Caleb. These warnings are there given to us to challenge us.

Not to discourage us, but to challenge us and say, don't make the same mistake. I told you about the Hebrew Christians who were not growing up. They were only drinking milk.

Look what he tells the Hebrew Christians in chapter 2. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 2, and verse 3. Hebrews chapter 2, verse 3. How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Now, I don't believe any of you have rejected God's great salvation. But, it's possible that many of you have neglected. You know the difference between rejecting something and neglecting something? You can reject a child or neglect a child.

Here, they were not rejecting this great salvation. No. They were neglecting it.

That means they had the opportunity to make use of the salvation and become overcomers, and they didn't. And so they remained babies. Every one of us must examine ourselves to see whether you are neglecting this great salvation that was purchased at such tremendous cost for us on the cross.

So, we need to ask ourselves, how can we be overcomers? Let me just show you a few things. Turn to 1 John in chapter 5. Here also he speaks about overcoming. How to overcome the world? And the world is described, before we go to that chapter 2, you see what the world is described in 1 John chapter 2. All that is in the world, 1 John 2, 16.

The world is described as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Three things that describe the world. The world, not the physical world, but this world system that's run by Satan.

The world system that's run by Satan consists of the lust of the flesh, sinful pleasures that cater to our body, sexual pleasure, etc. Sinful sexual pleasure and sinful, many other things that appeal to our eyes and gluttony. These are the lusts of the flesh.

And the lusts of the eyes is the temptation to, in a paraphrase, I think, Living Bible it says, to buy everything that you see. The temptation to buy something that you see in somebody's house, not because you need it, but because you covet it. It's a lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life.

He categorizes the world's attractions under these three categories. And he says here, in verse 15 of 1 John 2, If you love these things, you cannot love God. You can't love both.

The world is described here like another man who's trying to win you, the bride of Christ, to himself. And if you're engaged to Christ as your bridegroom, and you are drawn to this person called the world, with his sinful pleasures and attracting you with everything that can draw you away from God, you're a harlot. So now we come to 1 John 5. This world, how to overcome it? 1 John 5, in the middle it says, This is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

Whoever is born of God, overcomes the world, means has the capacity to overcome the world. Just like a little child when it's born, a normal child has the capacity, even though in the beginning it can't even get up from the cradle, that child has got the built-in capacity. One day to walk, run, climb mountains, grow up, become tall, get a college degree.

Capacity is all there. Whether he attains all that is another thing. So whoever is born of God has got the capacity to overcome all these things which I described as the world.

If we believe. This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. So we need to understand a little more about what faith is.

There is dead faith and the living faith. James speaks about faith without works and faith with works. And if it is only in the head, something I believe factually 2 plus 2 is 4, that's one type of faith.

Or San Francisco is in California. That's an intellectual knowledge. Believing something a fact.

Jesus Christ is the son of God. It's like believing that San Francisco is in California. He died for the sins of the world.

He rose up. He ascended to heaven. And he's coming back to this earth.

It's just like believing that Loveland is in Colorado. There's no difference between believing that and believing all these things I just said about Christ. That's faith without works.

James speaks about that. But the faith that the Bible speaks of is not just knowledge of certain facts. Many Christians, even this, say they are born again.

It's just a knowledge of certain facts. And they repeated certain words. But real living faith is a dependence upon God.

A helpless dependence upon God like a branch in a tree. That is faith. And when a branch is in a tree, it's bound to bring forth fruit.

Because the sap, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit, flows from the tree to the branch. And in a sense, it's effortless producing fruit. But when we have never lived that life in the beginning, it's a struggle to come to that life of faith.

But once you come to the life of faith, it's effortless. The Bible speaks about the rest of faith in Hebrew's form. It's a struggle to get there.

But once you get there, you come to a place of rest where it's almost spontaneous. So our faith is tested in the different situations we find ourselves in. It's very interesting that many people, many Christians think only of justification by faith.

But if you turn with me to Romans, Romans is the great book which speaks about how God declares us righteous by faith. But that's just laying the foundation. You believe that Christ died for you and you have received him as your Savior and made him Lord of your life.

You are declared righteous. And here it's described in Romans 5, one verse like this. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the basic kindergarten lesson. I have been accepted by my Father in heaven. My sins are forgiven.

Not only sins are forgiven. Justified means I have been declared to be a righteous person just as if I had never sinned in my life and just as if I'd been righteous from day one of my life. That is the meaning of justified.

It's an amazing thing that the blood of Christ does for us. Not only forgive our sins, but justify us. And we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then, it doesn't stop there. It says now we go on to verse 3, tribulations. We rejoice in tribulation.

See, first of all, verse 2, we rejoice that we have been, verse 2, we've been introduced by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we exult in that. Exult is a word which means we greatly rejoice and supremely happy.

See, that's something that comes here. It's the elementary stage of the Christian life. And if you notice here in Romans 5, I just want to show you the three times where that word exult comes.

You see, it's like a growth in the Christian life. The first level is where we exult or are excited and are so taken up with the fact that, verse 2, we are justified, our sins are forgiven, and we stand in God's presence accepted. We exult and hope the glory of God we get one day.

But the second stage, when you go on from there, is verse 3, where we get excited about the trials we are facing. And very few people go through that who pass in this class. To exult in hope of the glory of God, yes, everybody would like that.

But verse 2, to exult in tribulation. It's not that the tribulation itself is something exciting, but because the tribulation brings about perseverance and proven character, and makes me, proven character means it makes me like Christ. That's why I exult in trial.

I first start and exult the fact that God's accepted me. I'm his child, and I've got a hope for the future. Then I move on to the next class, which is exulting in the trials God sends into my life.

That's how we overcome. You can't be an overcomer if you don't have anything to overcome. And that's why once we come to the level of justified by faith, which is described in verse 1, the next step is to exult in tribulation.

And finally, it says in verse 11, we exult in God himself. That is the highest level of the Christian life, where I'm not even rejoicing in my own spiritual growth, and my overcoming sin, and my pressing on to perfection. No, even that becomes a stage to the highest level where I glory in God himself.

I'm taken up with God himself like the bride is taken up with the bridegroom in the Song of Solomon. That Jesus himself is what satisfies me, not the fact that I've got victory. See, for example, if you get victory over sin, for example, you're defeated by anger, and a day comes in your life where you're finished with anger, or it's exciting, or you're defeated by anxiety, and a day comes in your life, you're finished with anxiety, or you were always complaining or murmuring about something, and you're finished with it, and you come to the place where you can give thanks and everything.

Good. You rejoice in that. But there's a still higher level where you don't rejoice in your victories.

You rejoice in God himself, the person of God. See, even victory is a gift God gives you. But now we go beyond the gift to the giver himself in Romans 5:11.

So this is what spiritual growth is. This is what it means to be an overcomer. And tribulation and trial is a very important part of it.

The same thing we read in James in chapter 1. In James chapter 1, we read, first of all, he says to these believers, they're born-again believers, James chapter 1, verse 2, Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials. That's amazing how a mature Christian is excited when he comes into a trial, just like a worldly person is excited when there's a hike in his monthly salary. He goes to work one day, and the boss says, I've decided to double your salary.

He's excited. The spiritually-minded Christian is excited when he encounters various trials. He says, wow, this is going to increase my perfection.

For him, salary is perfection. This thing is going to increase my perfection. He's excited about it.

He doesn't say, oh, no, what is this trial that's come into my life? We need to look at trials from God's viewpoint. In our Indian school system, the final examination that comes at the end of the school year is very, very important because your promotion to the next class is not dependent on all the tests you did during the one year. That may be the system in some schools.

In the Indian schools, it was the final examination. So people had to really work hard to pass in the final examination. And they looked forward to it because the final examination is a tough examination, different subjects.

Why do they look forward to it? Why does a parent tell his child, well, even if you've got a fever, my son, go and write that examination. Never mind if you've got a stomachache or a headache. Go and do that examination.

Sending a sick child to school because the child will not get promoted to the next class if he doesn't pass that examination. So that's what it says here. Consider it a great joy that you're facing this examination now because this trial, verse 2, will test your faith.

Verse 3. This trial will test your faith like the examination tests a student's knowledge. And that will produce endurance which will finally make you, verse 4, perfect, lacking in nothing. That's an overcomer.

If you want a definition of an overcomer, here it is. One who endures in trials, verse 4, James 1, 4, allows the trials to have a perfect result in his inner man so that it makes him complete and perfect, lacking in nothing. He gets 100% because he's faced these trials in the power of the Holy Spirit in faith.

And he's an overcomer. You know, you remember, you looked at 1 John 5. This is the victory that overcomes all the temptations of the world, our faith. My faith, when I face a trial, that is for my good.

I mean, many children will say, no, mom, I don't want to go. Today's a tough examination. I don't want to go for it.

But the parents will say, you've got to go for it. Otherwise, you'll sit in the same class next year. So a sensible student, even if he's sick, he'll go and do that examination because his promotion depends on that to the next class, to the next level.

So it's the same with trial. The Bible speaks about trials as the means by which we become overcomers. So if your aim in life is to avoid trials, you'll never be an overcomer.

That's the reason why God allows many trials in the lives of his children. You know what is the last sentence that Jesus said to his disciples at the end of the Last Supper before they went to get seminium to the cross? Jesus gave them a long sermon. There are two long sermons of Jesus in the Gospels.

One is the Sermon on the Mount, three chapters, Matthew 5, 6, and 7. And the other long sermon of Jesus is at the Last Supper, John 13, 14, 15, 16. And what is the last sentence? Remember, this is the last sermon before he went to the cross. Chapter 17 is a prayer that is addressed to the Father.

The last sentence of John 16, which is the last word he spoke to his disciples was, I have said these things to you, verse 33, John 16, 33, that in me you'll have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. Imagine, that's the last thing that Jesus told his disciples.

You'd think that he'd give them some word of comfort. You know, we come to the church always expecting a word to comfort us and to encourage us and to say everything is okay, God loves you, he has accepted you. That's the mark of a spiritual baby who every day comes to get a chocolate.

Mom, give me a chocolate, give me an ice cream. There's a pretty foolish mother or father who keeps on giving chocolates and ice creams every day to their children as if that's their only food. You know how parents tell their children to eat the vegetables.

And things which are not so tasty but it's good for their body. So Jesus knows what's good for us and the last word he speaks is, in the world you will have tribulation. There again, trials, you're going to have trials.

But don't get worried, be bold. I have overcome the world. I also faced trials for the 33 1/2 years that I was on earth.

Jesus says, I faced many trials in the 30 years of Nazareth and the 3 1/2 years of my ministry and now I'm going to the cross. I have overcome the world and I want you to share my victory. What is the world? The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of blood, all the temptations that come to us from the devil.

He overcame all of them. It's a great statement. We read in John chapter 14, also in the last message that Jesus spoke of the last supper.

He says in John 14 and verse 30, in the middle of that verse, the prince of the world is coming, that's the devil, but he finds nothing in me. You remember Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness right at the beginning of his ministry being tempted by Satan for 40 days. And at the end of it, we read those three final temptations.

But he was tempted for 40 days. Not only 40 days, he was tempted for 33 1/2 years every day. But he never yielded.

Even in Gethsemane, a thought was put into his mind, don't go to the cross. But he overcame it and went. The prince of the ruler of this world comes, but he has found nothing in me.

He tried at every single point to penetrate me, couldn't get in. He was an overcomer, the prince of this world. And that's what he's saying in John 16, 33, I have overcome the world.

And I want you to overcome the world as well. That's what we read in 1 John 5, 4. This is the victory that overcomes the world. My faith, which is my helpless dependence upon the tree, Jesus, I cannot bring forth fruit.

I cannot be an overcomer. But if I helplessly depend upon the tree, upon Jesus and say, Lord, I want your sap, the sap of the tree, the Holy Spirit to keep on filling me every day. I don't want just one experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

I thank God for every experience of the Holy Spirit, but I want to be continuously filled, because I want to be an overcomer every single day. I want to overcome the way I speak, that my speech will always be with grace. You know what it means to overcome in your speech? Let me show you.

Colossians 4. Colossians 4. Colossians 4, verse 6. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, so that people who listen to you get a taste of it. You know, if you put one spoon of any food into your mouth, you immediately know whether it's got salt or not. It should be like that with our speech, that people who listen to us, immediately they say, there's grace in this person's speech.

I don't mean when you preach. I mean in our ordinary conversation, especially at home, with your husband, your wife, with your children, even when you're firmly disciplining your children, there must be the discipline of grace, not a discipline of anger. We all start with anger.

At least that's how I started as a father. And I knew that was not... I was a babe, but I wanted to grow. I wanted to be an overcomer.

So every time I disciplined with anger, I would get alone with God immediately and actually weep before God alone and say, Lord, I'm sorry. The discipline of my child was right. The anger was wrong.

Help me to eliminate the anger from my discipline, to do it the way you, God disciplines us, but he never does it with anger. He does it in love. I want to do it like that, Lord.

Let your speech always be with grace. Make it a goal in your life. Dear brother, sister, if you haven't reached that as yet, don't get discouraged.

Say, Lord, I'm going to get there. It took me, I'll tell you honestly, a number of years to get there. It was not overnight.

As a result of many years of weeping, praying, fasting, crying out to God, repenting, and little by little by little by little, I became an overcomer. I remember, I'll give you one example. You know, I knew that getting irritated was a sin.

And when you have small children at home, it's very easy to get irritated because they do something or the other to get on your nerves. Every child is like that. And I remember once, I battled that.

I said, Lord, I'm going to overcome this getting irritated with my children when they're small. I don't want to get irritated. I want to overcome it.

So I got to some level. And then one day I had a severe headache. Well, I believe Romans 8, 28, all things work together for good.

What's the good out of this headache now? Lord, tell me, did you ever have a headache when you were on earth? Why this headache? And this is what the Lord said to me in my heart. You have overcome irritation with your children when you didn't have a headache. Now I'm promoting you to a higher class where you overcome getting irritated when you have a headache.

And that is a higher class. It's a little more difficult. So God is always leading us higher.

You could resist this much pressure, so many pounds per square inch. And now I'm going to increase the pressure a few more pounds per square inch. Because I want to make you a strong overcomer.

It's like these people who go to the gym, you know. They are working every muscle and there are so many different machines there in the gym to develop your hands and shoulders and legs and stomach, your belly and your back and neck and everything. And all these things.

And these guys who go to the gym, they are determined to be strong. They have these pictures outside the gym of these people with muscles bulging all over their body and say, I want to be like that. And they work at it.

They work at it. It's not the fellow who goes once in a month to a gym who's going to get that type of body. He goes at it every day and works at it and works at it and works at it.

And that's how the Christian life is. And do you think it's enjoyable there? It's a strain. Every muscle develops when it's subject to a strain.

You know, essentially, what is happening in a gym is they are subjecting certain muscles to a strain. You subject that particular muscle on your hand to a strain, it becomes strong. You subject the muscle in your leg or thigh or back to a strain, it becomes strong.

And they do it more and more and more and more. Every muscle becomes strong and the body becomes muscular. Now there's a lot of difference between an obese, fat man and a muscular man.

Obesity in the Christian life is like knowledge. So many people have such a lot of knowledge, but it hasn't become muscle. They are not overcomers.

And so, that's the meaning of trial. God allows trial so that, just like in the gym, they subject their muscles to resistance, we resist and we overcome. I remember once, one of my grandchildren, when he was only about seven years old, asked me, Grandpa, why doesn't God kill the devil? Well, when a seven-year-old asks that question, they say, hey, he wants to take the Christian life seriously, whatever he's heard.

I said, okay, I'll tell you. And I told him how we develop our muscles by, you know, when you stretch a spring, you can have muscles and the hand will get strong. When you walk or run, you're subjecting the muscles in your leg to some resistance.

So it's by resistance that we develop muscles. So I said, God has allowed the devil to exist so that he'll resist you. And if you resist him, so that he will tempt you rather, and if you resist him, just like in the gym, your muscles become strong.

For example, I said to him, the devil will one day say to you, don't obey your dad or mom. Your dad and mom tell you to do something, don't do it. What are you going to do? Resist him.

Say, no, I'm going to listen to my dad and mom. Or when the devil tells you sometime, you did something wrong, but hide it, tell a lie. Resist him.

Say, no, I'm going to tell my dad and mom the truth. I say, you know, that's how you'll become strong. Now, you see, your good friends will never come and resist you like that.

But God's allowed the devil to exist to tempt you so that you can become strong. Yeah, and I want to say that not only to little children, but to grown-up people as well. James says, we rejoice in trials.

Count it only joy when we encounter trials. The actual translation of James chapter 1, verse 2 is, when you face a trial, count it only as joy because that is going to make you perfect, verse 4, and complete, lacking in nothing. That's an overcomer.

If you want a definition of an overcomer, there it is in James 1, verse 4. Perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. That's like the man who's gone to the gym and developed every muscle in his hands, his neck, his shoulder, his belly, his thighs, his legs, everywhere, lacking in nothing. God wants to do that spiritually for us, make us completely wise.

So let me go back to this last verse in Revelation chapter 21. We'll conclude with this, Revelation 21, and verse 7. This is what God says, He who overcomes will inherit everything that God has for man, and I will be his God, and he won't be a little baby in heaven. He will be my grown-up son.

That's, my dear brothers and sisters, that's what God wants every one of us to be, grown-up, mature sons. And we all know in our homes the difference between an immature little child and a grown-up, responsible son. That's what God wants us to be.

And the more we face those things, the more God can use us to fulfill his purpose here on earth, to use you to bless others. There is a particular task that God has for every one of you, brothers and sisters. He planned it when you were in your mother's womb, and that's why on a particular day in your life he allowed you to hear the gospel and come to Christ.

You made a lot of blunders in your life, and God's blotted all that out in the blood of Christ. And now he's brought you to the place where he says, I want to fulfill something in your life. Even if you've wasted many years of your life, don't get discouraged.

You can still make it. Take your life seriously at least from today and say, Lord, I want to be an overcomer, and I believe God will help you. Let's bow our heads.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time. I pray that you'll help us not to forget all that we have heard and help us to experience it in our daily life. Remember what we've heard today.

The Spirit of God will remind us, help us to overcome in our home, in our place of work, at all times. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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