Winning the War in Your Mind - Part 3

# Becoming a Soldier

## (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

We are continuing today in part three of our message series entitled “Winning the War in Your Mind.” We recognize that the mind is a battlefield and that we’re going to have to win this battle first in our minds so that our bodies, our relationships, and our freedom will follow. In this series we have been looking at the writings of the apostle Paul in the New Testament, because when it comes to the subject of winning the war in your mind, he has written more on the subject than any other biblical writer. And so, we’ve been talking about spiritual warfare, taking back our minds, replacing the lies of the enemy, and today I want to share with you about becoming a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Once again, we’re going to turn to the writings of the apostle Paul, because when it comes to engaging in spiritual warfare, he is second only to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, as we turn to the Word of God in second Timothy, Paul, this great spiritual warrior says,

“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

Paul tells us it’s not going to be easy; it’s going to be difficult to endure, but we’re not going to be in it alone. He says, “Endure hardship with us”, in other words we’re in this together, and so we’ve got to be prepared for the fight of our lives because the enemy is coming against us. We’re under attack, but we need to remember that it’s “us”, it’s “us” against the spiritual forces of darkness, and the flow of God’s anointing is pouring over “us”, the Spirit of the living God is empowering “us” and equipping “us” for this battle.

Today I want to talk to you about becoming a soldier, kind of like preparing to go to boot camp, because God wants you to be prepared to face the enemy. The assault is coming, there’s no getting around it, and for some of you it has been wave after wave, but God wants you to be ready for it. In fact, I believe that many of you are ready to engage with the enemy, because you’re on the front lines, you’re ready to take back what the enemy has stolen, and you’re ready to win the war in your minds.

And so, what we want to do is to align our minds, our wills, and our lives with the will of God. This is essential as we prepare to engage with the enemy because we will want to follow the lead of our commanding officer. As good soldiers of Jesus Christ we’ll need to settle that in our minds, that he is in charge, and we are following his command. Because none of us will be ready to face our spiritual enemy until we have first determined to stop trying to manipulate God to follow our own agenda and accept the fact that God has a greater plan and purpose for our lives.

Once we have settled that in our minds, that he is Lord, that he’s in charge, and we’re seeking only to please our commanding officer; at that moment we will have a heightened sense of purpose like never before. This is the start of the process of spiritual maturity as we get into rank and file, being connected to the church and committed to Christ. You see, we only start maturing as we spend time being discipled, being trained, being prepared and developed into a man or woman of God. God is building a great spiritual army, we are part of it, and he’s going to equip us with everything we need to accomplish his purpose. That’s why the Bible says,

“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Ephesians 6:10-11).

In other words, when you respond to the upward call of your commanding officer, the Lord Jesus Christ, you can stand against the devil’s schemes; because it’s God’s power, it’s God’s armor, and so the Holy Spirit tells us, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

Only then can we stand, and so as we align our minds with the mind of Christ, he gives us everything we need to accomplish his purpose. God is raising us up, he’s building a great army, and he wants us to stand to our feet because we’re going somewhere. In other words, God is not just raising you up to your feet so that you can be successful or even so that you can spend time with him, but he’s raising you up so that you can be a soldier and engage in spiritual warfare. He wants you on your feet so that you can walk with him, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes, but you have to understand that he has and even greater purpose. The Bible says it this way,

“No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2:4).

In other words, he doesn’t want us to get distracted, getting caught up in things of the world, just doing whatever we want to do, because we’re his soldiers. And so, we want to please our commanding officer, following his orders, standing when he says to stand, and marching forward when he says to march forward. In fact, Jesus wants us to understand that we could be defeated when we choose not to stand with him.

Jesus warns of this very real danger in John chapter 5, when he encountered a man who was unable to walk. The good news was that Jesus told him,

“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk” (John 5:8).

And at once the man was cured and went on his way. But later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him,

“See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (John 5:14).

You see, when God calls you, you only have two options, battle or bondage, and there is no middle ground. And so, when it comes to winning the war in your mind you have to be strong in the Lord and stand in his mighty power so that he can prepare you and equip you for battle. Of course, you could choose to just get by, to survive, sitting on the sidelines, but it won’t be long before you’re overcome and captured by the enemy. And so, you’ll want to stand in God’s Army, you’ll want to be a good soldier, because the misery of being captive to the enemy is worse than you could imagine.

In Luke chapter 11, Jesus gives us another example of a person that is set free, but then something worse happens to them. In verse 24, Jesus said,

“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first” (Luke 11:24-26).

In other words, Jesus tells us that you can lose what you have gained because you haven’t done anything with the freedom that you received. Now, I know that some of you may be wondering, “What could be worse than having a demon tormenting you?” And Jesus says, it’s when you have seven other spirits more wicked than the first tormenting you.

You see, it’s one thing to be set free, to be saved, to break an addiction, to be delivered from a demon, but it’s another thing to walk in it for a lifetime. Jesus teaches that a person can receive their freedom and then later lose their freedom. And so, when it comes to winning the war in our minds, we need to recognize that just because we’ve won one battle or been victorious in one area, that doesn’t mean that we can sit back and take it easy.

It’s wonderful to give your life to Jesus Christ and to be able to walk in that freedom, but in the book of Revelation, Jesus talks about a lukewarm faith. He says what you have received and heard, hold on to it, don’t become lazy, unloving and uncaring. He said to the church at Ephesus,

“Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (Revelation 2:5).

He warns the church in Philadelphia, “Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).

And so, it’s kind of like getting married, all the planning and counseling are easy compared to the challenges of staying married. Or getting a new car, it’s pretty easy to get a new car loan, but keeping that car and making that payment month after month is not as easy. And certainly, losing weight or being freed from an addiction or a bad habit is possible, but remaining free of that weight, that addiction or habit is what is challenging. And so, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Paul tells us that we should be disciplined. He says,

“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3).

You see, our freedom may have been free to us, but it wasn’t free. Jesus endured great suffering and even death; he paid the highest price. And so, we should treasure our freedom, enduring great hardship, wrestling and fighting, holding onto our freedom, because his intent was that,

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8.36).

And so, Jesus wants that temptation, that issue that you’re struggling with to be so far removed from your mind that it’s not an issue. He wants you to be free indeed, but it’s going to require a conscious decision to fight on our part, to be disciplined, to persevere, and to endure hardship.

As good soldiers of Christ Jesus, we’re going to be disciplined, enduring hardship, putting on the armor of God, so that we can take our stand against the devil’s schemes. Jesus warns us in Luke chapter 11,

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left” (Luke 11:24).

And so, it returns, there’s a temptation, an attack, an ambush. You’ve been set free, but you’re going to have to fight to hold onto it. When the enemy brings a thought into your mind, you’ve got to remind him that you are a new creation, he’s got the wrong person, he’s got the wrong address, because the old you died with Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago and you’ve been set free.

But what happens so many times when a person receives prayer, when they are set free, they know it, because they experienced his power. There is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and so they go home embracing their freedom and saying, “I’m not going to gossip anymore, overeat anymore, smoke anymore, look at pornography anymore, live a sexually immoral lifestyle anymore” and the house is swept clean and put in order. But what happens is that several days later they don’t feel the same conviction, in fact they begin to feel those old thoughts and feelings coming back. In other words, that demon spirit returns because it could not find rest in those barren dry places.

The Bible says in verse 25, it comes back to that place where it left, but…

“When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order” (Luke 11:25).

And so, this evil and impure spirit is going to begin whispering in your mind, he’s going to tell you that you were never set free in the first place, he’s going to tell you that it was just your emotions, but God tells us,

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

The Holy Spirit encourages us to stand firm, don’t be afraid, don’t surrender, keep resisting, keep fighting, keep walking, because I’m going to give you the victory, but you can’t give up. And so, the good news is that as you endure hardship as a good soldier he will flee from you, you will overcome the devil, because he’s not nearly as persistent as he claims to be. In fact, the devil is unable to persevere, he’s impatient, and patience come from God, because patient is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul tells us, hold your ground,

“Take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Ephesians 6:11).

You see, we’re not unaware of the devil’s schemes, we’re expecting him to return, we’re expecting temptations and trials. And so, we’re going to be persistent, maybe even a little bit radical, but we’re not going to give up hope.

We’re going to believe what God said, and we’re going to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, taking our stand against the devil’s schemes. Because when that impure spirit comes back to the house where it had been cast out, it’s going to find it swept clean and put in order. In other words, it couldn’t get back in, and so then Jesus says,

“Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself…” (Luke 11:26).

This is a warning that when you clean up your life, when you exercise self-control, you can have victory over that spirit, that temptation, but you need to be prepared for battle, because it’s likely that something worse, something more wicked and powerful will come along.

You see, your righteousness is going to be a demon repellent, but you’re going to need to do more than pray, you need to be strong in the Lord. If you’re fighting against temptation, maybe a spirit of gossip, a spirit of lust, or a spirit of self-harm, Jesus expects us to exercise self-discipline. He expects us to apply the effort to resist, he expects us to endure hardship, but he also says, and this is so important, he says,

“Submit yourselves, then, to God...” (James 4:7).

Because it’s only as we’re submitted to God that we’re able to flex our muscles, exercising self-discipline and enduring hardship. Then we’re able to “resist the devil, and he will flee” but it’s a radical type of faith that is willing to go to great extremes to resist sin. In fact, Jesus said it this way,

“If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away…” (Matthew 5:30).

And so, maybe you’ve come up for prayer countless times, you put a filter on your computer, you memorized that Bible verse, but you’re still struggling in that body of flesh. In other words, you may have declared freedom over that spirit in Jesus’ name, but you’re still living in that body of flesh.

I believe many of us have to come to the awareness that we have a bigger enemy than we previously thought. You see, we know it, we say it, but are we really doing it? The Bible says,

“Submit yourselves, then, to God...” (James 4:7).

And your victory will only come when you have the conviction and the self-discipline to put your flesh on the cross. The problem is that this is something that God won’t do for you, it’s something that God wants to do with you, you’ve got to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

That’s what the apostle Paul wrote, and he said it this way in Galatians chapter 2,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me…” (Galatians 2:20).

You see, Paul understood the importance of dying to self, dying to that body of flesh, and making sure that our lives reflect a resemblance of the self-denial that Jesus called us to. In other words, we need to establish disciplines and routines in our lives equivalent to Jesus’ invitation. He said, “If anyone would come after me,” he must what?

"He must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

You see, that’s not glamorous, that’s not going to draw a crowd, but Jesus was never impressed with the crowd. He’s looking for that one who says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.” And the self-discipline to follow Jesus doesn’t mean that you get everything you want, sleep as long as you want, eat whatever you want, and do whatever you want. In fact, that kind of life makes it very difficult to resist the enemy, because it’s very hard to fight the flesh when you’re feeding it every day.

That’s why Paul said in second Timothy,

“No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2:4).

And so, you will want to starve your appetite for things of the world, waking up early for prayer, taking time to fast, seizing every opportunity to give, because it’s really okay if your flesh is not comfortable. You want to please your commanding officer above all, and so in a moment of temptation, because you have trained your flesh in times of comfort, it will be restrained in times of trial.

And there’s one more thing I want to draw out of this text for you today. We’ve talked about enduring, self-discipline, submitting to God, starving the flesh, but there’s one more thing that is very important. The Bible says that when the evil spirit comes back, verse 25,

“When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order” (Luke 11:25).

In other words, the house was clean, but it was not full. Everything was in order, but it wasn’t occupied. And what I mean is that we have a tendency to remove the bad things or the sinful things from our lives without replacing them with good things. And so, we limit our freedom, but we still do what we want to do, instead of doing what we should be doing, because God never intended for us to leave our lives empty, but that we would fill ourselves with him.

And so, God’s purpose for setting us free, free indeed, was not just to get us out of sin, not just so that we would have a good life, not just so that we could be free to do whatever we wanted, but to bring us into a better life, under a better master, where we are satisfied in him. This is so important, because the moment you realize that Christ is all that you need, that his grace is sufficient for you, you won’t need anything else, you won’t be bound by anything else. That’s what the apostle Paul said in Galatians,

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

In other words, don’t let yourself be burdened again by secret lust and temptations, chained up by addiction, in bondage to the false expectations, but embrace the freedom that Christ died to give.

And so, Jesus didn’t clean up that house, casting out that impure spirit so that it would be clean, swept, and orderly. That wasn’t his goal, he wants to fill that place with himself, because being empty is dangerous. Being free is dangerous if you’re not filled with the presence of God, and that’s why Jesus warned,

“The final condition of that man is worse than the first” (Luke 11:26).

You see, all that life has to offer is only an appetizer because only the Lord can satisfy. It’s only as we seek him, submitting ourselves to him, being transformed by the renewing of our minds that we will be full.

True freedom is not found in emptiness, freedom is not found in emptying your mind, freedom is not found in removing prayer from schools or taking God from the public square. The Bible says,

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

And so, until the Spirit of the Lord is there, you’re not really free, because freedom comes by giving the Holy Spirit control of your life. As you submit to God, as you turn on the light, as you are being filled, you drive out the darkness. Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, depression is pushed out, anger is pushed out, sexual tendencies are pushed out, addictions are pushed out and replace with the fullness of God.

Winning the war in your mind is not about giving God a little more of your time, it’s about giving God all of your life. It’s about surrender, making Jesus Lord of your life, that guarantees the freedom of victory. True freedom is only found when the Holy Spirit is Lord of your life. That is his will for you, that you would submit your life completely to him.

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