

## **STOP STRUGGLING!**

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the largest freshwater turtles is the alligator snapping turtle. Found primarily in the southeastern United States, these massive turtles have been known to weigh close to 110 kilograms. They are carnivorous, and while their diet is primarily fish, they have been known to eat almost anything else they can find in the water—even in a few cases small alligators!

The alligator snapping turtle relies on a uniquely deceitful method of foraging for fish. It will lie completely still on the floor of a lake or river with its mouth wide open. At the end of the turtle's tongue is a small, pink, worm-shaped appendage. The turtle wiggles the end of its tongue so that it looks like a worm moving through the water. When a fish comes to eat the worm, the turtle's jaws rapidly close, trapping the fish so that it cannot escape.

Similarly to the snapping turtle's lure, temptation comes in the guise of something desirable, but it always carries destruction with it in the end. If we could see the end result rather than the tempting part, it would be far easier to resist. But Satan knows this, so he cleverly disguises what is deadly in the guise of something pleasurable.

We are all subject to temptation. We know that our fleshly nature is in conflict with our spirit and it will try to get the upper hand. Daily life can be a momentous battle as we fight temptation and the lure of the world in our desire to remain pure before God. Today I want to give us some guidance on how to overcome sin, particularly if anyone is having a particular struggle with it and seeming to be losing the battle. I'm here to encourage you today. The battle may be raging fiercely, but it's already been won. There is victory for us and by applying the truths I will share from God's word this morning, it is possible to stop struggling and begin living in the victory God has already given us.

### **MESSAGE**

The struggle with sin is real. Paul wrote about it in Romans:

**Romans 7:14-15** (NLT) So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. 15 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.

Paul went on to describe himself as wretched or miserable. How do you feel when you struggle with sin? This is a great description. Useless, horrible, hopeless, failure, these are some other descriptions satan will put in your mind for you to think of yourself as without help. That is exactly what he wants.

Paul continued: **Romans 7:18 -23** And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. 20 But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. 21 I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22 I love God's law with all my heart. 23 But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

And he finally addresses the sense of hopelessness that comes from this sinful behaviour: **Romans 7:24-25** Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25 Thank God! **The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.** So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

The answer to our struggle with sin is Jesus Christ. Only He can free us from this slavery to sin.

### **CRIME IS NOT A DISEASE**

The challenge in hearing Paul's words there is this, "If I can't beat my flesh, then why should I bother trying?" That, Christian family, is the WRONG approach! Here's an example of what happens when we think like that:

In the 1950s a psychologist, Stanton Samenow, and a psychiatrist, Samuel Yochelson, sharing the conventional wisdom that crime is caused by environment, set out to prove their point. They began a 17-year study involving thousands of hours of clinical testing of 250 prison inmates. To their astonishment, they discovered that the cause of crime cannot be traced to environment, poverty, or oppression. Instead, crime is the result of individuals making, as they put it, wrong moral choices. In their 1977 book, *The Criminal Personality*, they concluded that the answer to crime is a, "Conversion of the wrong-doer to a more responsible lifestyle."

In 1987, Harvard professors James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein came to similar conclusions in their book *Crime and Human Nature*. They determined that the cause of crime is a lack of proper moral training among young people during the morally formative years, particularly ages one to six.

It's exactly the same with sin. We can blame our sinful fleshly nature and just carry on sinning because we have grace, or we can say, "I understand that Jesus died for my sins, I know that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, I know that this struggle with sin is something I will have to endure, but I'm still going to do all I can to sin as little as is possible. I'm going to put in place some spiritual disciplines that will result in a more responsible Christian lifestyle and help me to make the correct, godly moral choices I need to make so that I can live a holy life.

## FOUR PRINCIPLES TO HELP US IN OUR STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN

### 1. PUT GOD FIRST

In **James 1** we read about the progression from temptation to sin: **James 1:14-15** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

It starts with our OWN DESIRES. Is that not the "me, myself and I" we keep speaking about? When we place our "Own Desires" above obedience to God's word, we are certainly NOT putting God first.

James 4 gives us the key to dealing with our "Own Desires". **James 4:7-8** (NKJV) Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- To put God first, we must submit to Him.
- To put God first, we must resist the devil with all his fleshly temptations.
- To put God first means we must draw near to Him.
- We must cleanse our hands (that we use to sin with) and purify our hearts (where the desire for sin is conceived).
- To put God first means we can't be double minded, its either God or God, bouncing from sin to God and then from God to sin is definitely being double minded!

***Church, can we truly say God is first? Or are we allowing our flesh to indulge in sinful pleasure whenever we feel like it?***

### 2. MEMORISE SCRIPTURE

**Psalm 119:9 & 11** (NKJV) How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, **That I might not sin against You.**

- God's word is an effective barrier against sin!
- When Jesus was tempted by satan, every time He resisted by answering the devil with another Scripture.
- Meditating on and quoting scripture is a great counter-offence against carnal thoughts that pop into our minds.

**Joshua 1:8** (NKJV) This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success

***Do you want success when resisting temptation? Meditate on God's word, speak God's word. Memorise God's word. When last did you memorise a scripture?***

### **3. TAKE YOUR SINFUL THOUGHTS CAPTIVE**

The best way to prevent the progression from temptation, to sin, is to take those wrong thoughts captive the moment they start.

**2 Corinthians 10:5** (NKJV) casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

**Romans 12:1-2** (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The battlefield is the mind. Put on the helmet of salvation, not the helmet of sinful thinking.

Paul taught the Philippians about good thinking:

**Philippians 4:8** (NKJV) Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

What is true, what is noble, what is just, what is pure, what is lovely, if anything is of good report and if there is anything that is praiseworthy...

When sinful thoughts come, we have an arsenal of good thinking that we can turn against that attack. We need to train ourselves to think right!

***What's your thought life like? Where are you allowing your mind to go to? Is it possible that you are indulging yourself with sinful thoughts? Then it's time for a change of mind!***

### **4. WALK IN THE SPIRIT!**

**Galatians 5:16-23** (NKJV) I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I

tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

**We need to learn to walk in the Spirit!** We have, over the past month watched Skylar learn to walk. At first, all she could do was stand, then she unsteadily took two steps, then more, with constant falls. But now she is walking more confidently each day. She still falls but that's normally when she tries to run. There will come a day when a fall is a rare exception!

***What about you and I? Are we still learning to walk in the Spirit? Are we stumbling still? All it takes is practice, it will get better. Let's start by learning to bear the fruit of the Spirit and renouncing the works of the flesh!***

## CONCLUSION

Edwin Cooper was a famous clown, yet almost no one knew his real name. Coming from a family of circus clowns, Cooper began performing before audiences when he was just nine years old. He became a fixture on television in the 1950s as Bozo the Clown. In addition to entertaining both young and old, Cooper had a message for his "buddies and partners" every week: get checked for cancer. Yet Cooper was so busy working that he neglected to follow his own advice. By the time his cancer was discovered, it was too late for it to be treated. Edwin Cooper died at just forty-one years of age from a disease he had warned many others to watch out for.

Sin is far more deadly than the most aggressive and fast-growing cancer. Sin kills and destroys everything it touches. From the Fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden until now, sin takes no prisoners. This is the purpose behind everything Satan does. Jesus said, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10). Because of his evil nature and his hatred of everything good, the devil brings destruction to everything within his reach.

When we see sin as God does, we will not allow ourselves to be tempted to get a little closer to the line to see if we are still safe. God hates sin with a holy and righteous fury, and so should we. When we find ourselves struggling with by sin, it is time for us to do something about it. We can start by:

- Putting God first instead of choosing to indulge our own fleshly nature.
- Memorising scripture which we can use to protect ourselves.
- Taking wrong thoughts captive.
- Learning to walk in the Spirit.

God is graceful, He does forgive us, but we need to do our part. There are many other tools in God's word to help us get victory over sin. We can stop struggling and begin **living victorious lives. Let's not wait, time is running out.**