

Spiritual Breakthrough

The Awesome Power of Faith, Prayer and Fasting!

Many, if not all, of God's people are often beset by some affliction, or some habitual sin, that they seem unable to overcome. Are you having trouble overcoming sin? Are you burdened down with guilt due to intractable sins, weaknesses, failures to overcome? What are the KEYS to spiritual overcoming and spiritual BREAKTHROUGH?

William F. Dankenbring

Sometimes people feel like giving up and quitting -- throwing in the towel -- and develop a "what's the use" attitude. Yet God's word gives us much encouragement, and provides the answers for those who are willing to listen, and obey.

What about you? Are you sometimes offended, begin to listen to the wiles and seductive influence of Satan the devil? Do you sometimes allow gossip and tall tales from former brethren and associates, to take their toll on your own attitude? Are you allowing some besetting sin to get you down in the dumps, buried in the doldrums?

What is the nature of your own personal spiritual struggle? Are you having difficulty in overcoming?

Jesus Christ said, "*He that overcometh shall inherit all things*; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev.21:7). He also said: "And he that OVERCOMETH, and keepeth my works unto the END, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall RULE them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Rev.2:26-27).

Are You an "Overcomer"?

Do you sometimes feel like quitting – shirking it all – saying, "I can't do it – it's too hard!?" Are you fighting an attitude of bitterness, anger, deep down resentment? Does life seem to be too difficult to bear? Are you easily discouraged?

The apostle Paul said, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Phil.4:13). So can you! Read that again! Philippians 4:13 – "I CAN DO ALL

THINGS THROUGH CHRIST *which strengtheneth me.*” The word for “do” in this verse is the Greek word *ischuo* (number 2480 in Strong's Concordance), which means “to have or exercise force,” “be able, avail, can do, prevail, be of strength, be whole.” It is derived from the word *ischus* which means, “force, forcefulness, ability, might, power, strength.” Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines this word as “ability, force, strength, might, power.” It defines *ischuo* as “to be strong,” to be robust and in sound health, “to have power,” to exert, wield power, evidenced in extraordinary deeds, “to have strength to overcome,” “to be of force, avail.”

Paul had a very positive, confident, powerful attitude. Do you believe you can accomplish, prevail, conquer, overcome, and *do* all these things through Christ, as Paul believed?

Paul also wrote, “For I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth IN me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the FAITH of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal.2:20).

Does Christ really live His life in you? If you are *really* a true Christian, He does (Rom.8:9-11). And if Christ lives in you, through the Holy Spirit, then YOU can be an OVERCOMER, even as He was an overcomer! But Paul warns us, we should not *assume* our conversion. Have we really repented? How DEEP and PROFOUND is our repentance and conversion? Paul said, along these lines, “*Examine yourselves*, whether ye be in the faith” (II Cor.13:5). Don't just take it for granted -- don't assume!

Why Such Urgent and Painful Trials?

Why do we have these trials, and why do they seem so urgent, today, and worse than before?

Because there is not much time left. We are *running out of time to overcome!* So God is getting serious about motivating us to change and grow and do our part so that we can be “spotless and blameless” before Him (II Pet.3:14). God is “turning up the heat,” as it were, and putting on more pressure. He has got to get us ready for the coming of Christ, and that coming is drawing closer day by day -- it is very close now -- and there isn't any time to waste in overcoming our sins and faults, and having our character perfected and polished!

God is able to work this character development in our lives by His interaction with us, through His Holy Spirit, “to keep you from falling, to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). He is very busy preparing the “bride” for the up-coming wedding, and so He is sanctifying us, setting us apart, and cleansing us “with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present us to himself a glorious church (bride), not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,” but that we should be “holy and without blemish” (Eph.5:25-27). Christ *died* in order to accomplish this. Do you think God, His Father and our Father, will let His death be in vain? Certainly not! He will succeed in “bringing many sons to glory” (Heb.2:10).

Our trials are merely proof positive that God is dealing with, scrubbing, and perfecting us, through the blood and Spirit of Christ, through His Word and its cleansing effect, and through the "fire" of testing and searing and scorching; clay pots cannot be firmly finished without being put into the oven to "bake" for a while, in order to make them beautiful and lasting vessels of honor to their Maker. As James wrote: "*Count it all joy when you fall into divers (different) trials; knowing this, that the trying (testing) of your faith worketh (buildeth) patience*" (James 1:2-3) -- and "ye have need of *patience*" (Heb.10:36), "that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise" (same verse). "Be *patient*, therefore, unto the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7). "Be you also *patient*" (Jas.5:8); "stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (same verse).

How much more "nigh" is His coming now, than when James wrote these words 1,900 years ago? James says we should remember the prophets of God -- Noah, Daniel, Job, and all the rest -- "for an example of *suffering affliction*, and of *patience*" (James 5:10).

What To Do When Trials Come

So what should we do when troubles come, when sins engage us, and seem to whip us, and flatten us, and knock us for a loop? What should we do when our attitude begins to get bitter, or sour, or resentful? What should we do when we are tempted to reject God's truth, reject the authority He placed in His Church, His government, and the word of His ministers? What should we do when Satan sidles up alongside us, and whispers in our ear, "Yea, hath God really said . . .?" What should we do when we are tempted to doubt?

James says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, *nothing wavering*. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways*" (James 1:5-8). The apostle Paul wrote that "he that doubts is condemned," because what he does is not of faith (Rom.14:23), "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

What should we do, then, when we are severely tempted? When Satan begins to make a "wedge" in our spiritual armour? What should we do in life, when things seem to be getting worse, going wrong, and when the situation seems hopeless and impossible?

I once saw a sign that said, "Cheer up, things could be worse. So I cheered up -- and sure enough, things got worse!" It seemed to speak volumes about the human condition, and the helpless, hopeless feeling of discouragement and depression people often feel. Things get bad. There seems to be no way out. Panic strikes! And the problem is—we forget GOD!

However, we shouldn't feel that we cannot win the victory or overcome. With the

help of Christ Jesus, all things are possible. With God's help, we *can* OVERCOME!

Asa, King of Judah

At one time, a huge army from Ethiopia came against king Asa of ancient Judah, numbering a million men under arms (II Chron.14:9). The king and all Judah were frightened. Nevertheless, they did not give up, even though they knew not what to do. The battle was set in array. At that point, we read in the Scriptures, Asa prayed to God, crying out, saying:

“Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You. In Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; do not let man prevail against You!” (II Chron. 14:11).

What happened? “So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were *destroyed before the LORD*, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil” (v.12-13).

After this, God sent a prophet to the king. God's prophet said to Asa, “Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, *while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you*” (II Chron.15:2).

The prophet sent by God, went on to say, “Now for a long season Israel had been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But *when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them*. And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity” (verses 3-6).

Sounds like our age, today, doesn't it? Think about it! But even in such a time, the prophet told Asa and Judah, “But you, *be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!*” (II Chron.15:7).

Let GOD Fight Your Battles!

Another time, much later, during the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, another huge army -- a vast army of Moabites, Ammonites, and the children of Seir -- came against Judah and king Jehoshaphat, who was a righteous king, who feared God. Jehoshaphat assembled all the leaders and the people in Jerusalem, and led them in prayer, seeking God's intervention and deliverance. Jehoshaphat prayed to God, and

committed the entire nation and people to God's hands. Notice his fervent words. The king prayed: "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, *but our eyes are upon You*" (II Chron.20:12).

At that point God raised up a prophet from among the people to encourage the king and the people of Judah. The prophet declared to them:

"Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for *the battle is not yours, but God's* . . . You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, **STAND STILL AND SEE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD**, *who is with you*, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you" (II Chron.20:15-17).

The king and the people bowed their faces to the ground, and worshiped the LORD, and the Levite singers stood up to sing praises to God. Early the next morning they all rose up and went out to the Wilderness of Tekoa. The king admonished them, "Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper" (v.20). So they went forth, with the singers of the Levites in front of the army, singing lustily, bravely, heartily, with gusto! (v.21-22). They were singing praises to God, even *before* He intervened and saved them, or took any action, or manifested Himself in any direct way!

The Key of Living Faith

The first "key" to spiritual victory, breakthrough, and overcoming is simple, godly faith. But what kind of faith? Just what IS "faith"?

The apostle Paul explained, "Now *faith is* the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. . . Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God . . . But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb.11:1-6).

Abraham set us all an example of faith. We read of him: "[Abraham] being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He *STAGGEERED NOT* at the promise of God through unbelief; but was **STRONG IN FAITH**, giving glory to God; *and being FULLY PERSUADED* that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom.4:19-21).

Faith ALONE Is Not Enough!

But faith alone, is dead and worthless. We must also do our own part!

The apostle James said, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (James 2:14). James continues, “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled: notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so *faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone*” (James 2:15-17).

Now don't blame me -- *I* didn't say that. James did! And *GOD* inspired him to do it! Those who teach that there are “NO WORKS” required for salvation can eat their hat -- their words -- or eat straw! They are DEAD WRONG! In order for our faith to be effective, we must have good works -- that is, we must OBEY God's commandments, keep His laws, and follow the example set by Yeshua our High Priest and the Captain of our salvation!

James adds, “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that *faith without works is DEAD?*” (v.20). James mentions the example of Abraham, “Was not Abraham our father justified by *works*, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and *by works was faith made perfect?*” (v.21-22). James concluded, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so *faith without works is dead also*” (James 2:26).

We need faith AND WORKS in order to become OVERCOMERS! What “kind” of works? The works of OBEDIENCE to the laws and commandments of GOD!

The apostle Peter declared, “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given *to them that OBEY him*” Acts 5:32). Faith in God must be combined with *obedience* to the LAWS of God! The apostle Paul wrote, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! [God forbid!] On the contrary, we ESTABLISH the law” (Rom.3:31, NKJV).

The apostle Paul wrote: “Now the just shall live by faith: but *if any man draw back*, my soul shall have NO PLEASURE in him. But we are NOT of them who *draw back* unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:38-39).

This wonderful attribute of faith is not something we must work up ourselves, by our own human efforts. Not at all. But as Paul tells us, “For by grace are ye saved through FAITH; and that not of yourselves: it [the very FAITH itself!] is the GIFT OF GOD; not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph.2:8-9).

This faith is the very faith of Christ put within us by the Spirit of God. It is the very same faith Jesus had!

The Need for Earnest Prayer

There are several Hebrew and Greek words used for prayer. Let us take a brief

look at each of them.

Jesus Christ set us an example in prayer. We read: “Afterwards he went up into the hills to pray” (Mark 6:46). We also read: “The next morning he was up long before daybreak and went out alone into the wilderness to pray” (Mark 1:35).

Prayer is between each one of us and God. It is usually a private matter, and it is therefore good to get off by oneself to spend time in prayer. It is good to go into a private room, close the door so you won't be disturbed and then pray.

The word translated “pray” in these verses is the Greek word *proseuchomai* which means to pray, worship, to open up and pour out your heart. It is used 78 times in the New Testament and is the most common word for prayer. It is the word used also in Matthew 6:5-9 where Jesus taught His disciples a model outline of prayer, showing them what to pray for and how they should generally organize their prayers.

He instructed them: “Pray along these lines: ‘Our Father in heaven, we honor your holy name. We ask that your kingdom will come now. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give our food again today, as usual, and forgive us our sins, even as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. Don't bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One. Amen.’” (Matt. 6:9-13).

Intense Supplication

The perfect example in prayer, of course, was set by our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah. We read: “Yet while Christ was here on earth he *pleaded* with God, *praying with tears and agony of soul* to the only one who would save him from (premature) death. And God *heard his prayers* because of his *strong desire* to obey God at all time” (Heb. 5:7).

The King James Version renders this verse: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and *supplications* with *strong crying and tears* unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.” The strongest, most intensive form of prayer is “supplication.” This is the Greek word *deesis*. It refers to powerful entreaty and intense and fervent requests.

The apostle James tells us with apostolic authority: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray (speak up, pour out your heart) one for another, that ye may be healed. The *effectual fervent prayer* (supplication) of a righteous man availeth MUCH” (Jas. 5:16).

The *Living Bible* translates this: “Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. *The earnest prayer* of a righteous man has *great power* and wonderful *results*.” *The Amplified Bible* has it: “Confess to one another therefore your faults – your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins; and pray (also) for one another, that you may be healed and restored – to a spiritual tone of mind

and heart. The *earnest (heart-felt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous POWER available -- dynamic in its working.*"

James continues: "Elijah was a human being with a nature such as we have -- with feelings, affections and constitution as ourselves; and he *prayed earnestly* for it not to rain, and no rain fell on the earth for three years and six months. And (then) he prayed again and the heavens supplied rain and the land produced its crops (as usual)" (Jas. 5:17-18).

What is God telling us in these verses? He is assuring us that, in other words, we don't have to be some kind of spiritual giant, for God to answer our prayers. We often tend to think of Elijah as some spiritual giant, but James here tells us that the famous prophet of old was just like us, completely human as we are. He had all the same impulses, drives, emotions, feelings, and even became discouraged and depressed at times. Yet when he prayed, the dead were raised, and miracles occurred! When he prayed, dramatic results took place! He himself had no power or strength at all. But when he prayed, *God heard his prayers – and intervened!*

To have our prayers answered, WITH POWER, with dynamic and direct intervention of Almighty God, we must rekindle the Spirit of God and become renewed in WHITE-HOT SIZZLING ZEAL AND SPIRITUAL ENERGY of God!

The Phillips Translation says, "TREMENDOUS POWER IS MADE AVAILABLE through a good man's earnest prayer."

James Moffatt translated, "The prayers of the righteous have a POWERFUL EFFECT."

James goes on to cite the example of the prophet Elijah -- a praying man, who spent much time communing with God in prayer. James wrote, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are (he was human, and had weaknesses just as we do), and HE PRAYED EARNESTLY that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (Jas.5:17-18).

The Earnest Need for ZEAL

How much REAL zeal do you have in your prayers? Do you raise your arms and hands toward heaven, sometimes, and your arms tremble and shake with the intensity and exertion of your emotion and prayer?

Jesus Christ was filled with the ZEAL of God, and His Spirit. This is one reason He could do the amazing miracles which documented His Messiahship! Prophesying of Christ, David wrote, "FOR THE ZEAL OF THINE HOUSE HATH EATEN ME UP (CONSUMED ME); and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me" (Psalm 69:9).

Yes, if you begin to manifest ZEAL for God, as Jesus did, then men and ministers will begin to reproach you, too. They cannot stand a white-hot, fervent servant of God. "Take it easy," they will tell you; "Calm down. Go with the flow. Don't get all upset because the Church won't admit error when you show it to them. Just forget it. Leave it to God. Let Him correct them. It's none of your business." And so they remain in their rut, their nose to the dirt, and cannot see the forest for the trees. Truly, as Jesus said, they are BLIND spiritually!

One reason there is such a lack of powerfully answered prayers, today, is the tremendous lack of real spiritual ZEAL! That is why God commands us, through the apostle Paul, "That is why I would remind you to STIR UP -- REKINDLE THE EMBERS, FAN THE FLAME AND KEEP BURNING -- the (gracious) gift of God, (the inner fire) that is in you" (II Tim.1:6, Amplified Bible).

But prayer, zeal, faith, and obedience, are often not enough. There is still something lacking! A missing ingredient, as it were. It is the simple exercise of fasting!

The Incredible Power of FASTING!

When Jesus Christ, Yeshua, cast a demon out of a young man, the people were amazed. Yeshua had said to the father, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23). The father responded, as we might, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (v.24). Christ proceeded to cast the demon out, and later His disciples asked him why they had been unable to do so. He declared: "This kind can come out by nothing but *prayer and fasting*" (Mark 9:29).

When you fast, you learn how weak, insignificant, useless – utterly worthless – you, yourself are. You learn how little and weak you are of your own strength. You get hungry, thirsty, and your pride is toppled, your vanity is burst, your self-esteem is shattered. It is a *humbling* experience. You learn that you are merely a very physical human being.

Without fasting, you may *mentally* admit that you are not much. But you don't really comprehend it – *you don't feel it!* You don't see how really weak and insignificant you are, until you begin to do without food or drink for a period of time. *Then* the lesson is driven home – right into the pit of your stomach!

But fasting, to pay spiritual dividends, must be with the right attitude of humility and seeking God. It must not be done in pride, self-importance, or human egotism. Its purpose is to HUMBLE the self! Self-righteous fasting does not produce miracles, breakthroughs, victory, success, and triumph!

God thunders, "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day to make your voice heard on high."

(Isaiah 58:3-4). God declares, “Is not *this* the fast that *I have chosen?* to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor that are cast out ; when you see the naked, that you cover him; and not hide yourself from your own flesh?” (verses 6-7). This is the kind of fast God desires – a sincere, humble, *self-searching fast*, striving to root out sin and wrongdoing and drawing close to God.

Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough!

God declares that if we fast *with the right attitude*, “Then your *light shall break forth* like the *morning*, your *healing* shall spring forth speedily: and your *righteousness* shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard” (v.8).

In other words, zealous prayer, combined with diligent obedience to God, with the added impact of faith, and fasting, leads to BREAKING FORTH from the bonds of sin and the chains of spiritual SLAVERY!

It is the KEY TO OVERCOMING ALL PROBLEMS, FAULTS, SINS, OPPRESSION, WEAKNESSES, AND OBSTACLES IN LIFE!

It is the key to SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH! Like an army that suddenly BREAKS THROUGH the enemy lines, and begins rampaging and smashing forward, sniffing forward, cutting the enemy down and destroying their supplies and lines of communication.

God goes on, “Then you shall call, and the Lord *will answer*; You shall cry, and he will say, *Here I am*. If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, *and speaking wickedness*, if you extend your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noon day: *The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought*, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail” (verses 9-11).

Yeshua received *power* from God the Father to do mighty works, miracles, and accomplish the Work of God! What were the KEYS to Jesus' spiritual power? He fasted and prayed and obeyed God, continually.

You also can receive that spiritual power – *great power from God* – and strength and energy and spiritual resources to break through, and break out of the narrows, trials, problems, obstacles. How? By drawing closer to God in *prayer and fasting!* You can receive new vigor, enthusiasm, spiritual steadfastness and staying power!

Fasting can change your approach to God, broaden your horizons, fill you with greater FAITH, and *change your LIFE!* Through true fasting, and drawing close to God by afflicting yourself, you can become a ***MIGHTY MAN OF SPIRITUAL VALOR!***