

MAY

DEFEATING THE ENEMIES OF DESTINY

We are on a journey of destiny. To reach our destination, we must eliminate major obstacles which block the fulfillment of God's promises and provision in our lives. We must defeat the enemies of destiny. These enemies are barriers that are as formidable today as they were to the nation of Israel as they stood at the border of their Promised Land.

During the month of March, you learned about the peril of disobedience and how the words you speak can affect your destiny. Last month--April--you studied about the major battlefield of the heart and mind. This month's devotions focus on the hindrances of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world: The appeal of the world has kept many from reaching their divine destiny--its riches, power, philosophy, and sensual appeal. At the border of their promised land, Israel looked back to the only world they knew--Egypt. "Would to God we had remained in Egypt," they said, as they remembered what they perceived to be the good things it offered.

The flesh: The lure of a sinful nature, called the flesh in the Bible, is also a major hindrance to reaching your destiny. God told Joshua that the people must be circumcised before advancing to claim His promises--a covenant sign for Israel and a spiritual analogy of dealing with the flesh (Joshua 5:9). Likewise, you must deal with the lusts of the flesh in order to fulfill your divine destiny.

The devil: The devil uses the world and the flesh, plus his demonic hosts, to war against you spiritually, lead you into rebellion, and rob you of your destiny.

The world, the flesh, and the devil are powerful forces that attacked Israel at the border of their Promised Land. They turned back in defeat. Do not make the same mistake.

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MAY 1 TWO KINGDOMS

Within the natural and spiritual realms, there exists both natural and spiritual kingdoms. Natural kingdoms are governments of states and nations. Politicians, presidents, kings, and dictators rule these kingdoms. In the spiritual world there are two kingdoms: The kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God.

The kingdom of Satan consists of Satan himself, spiritual beings called demons, and all people who live in sin and rebellion against God. Satan's control, however, is limited and his kingdom will someday end. God eventually will bring all the kingdoms of the world and Satan's domain under the authority of the Kingdom of God:

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of Our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15)

This is...

*...to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.
(Ephesians 1:10, NIV)*

God's Kingdom consists of God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), angels, and all people who live in loving submission to Him.

Every person alive is a resident of one of these two kingdoms, the kingdom of Satan or the Kingdom of God:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey... (Romans 6:16)

Changing your citizenship from the kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God is accomplished by accepting the finished work of Jesus Christ. Accepting Jesus as the agent for making a spiritual transfer between the kingdoms is a choice that must be made consciously and individually. Any such transfer between kingdoms can be done only through Jesus Christ. He is the one designated by God the Father to handle the legalities involved in making a change of residency from the kingdom of Satan to that of God through the salvation experience:

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

To which kingdom do you belong? You can in no way conquer the sinful appeals of the world, the flesh, and the devil unless you are a citizen of God's Kingdom.

MAY 2

THE REAL BATTLE

Just as there are wars fought in the natural realm, there are battles in the spiritual realm. As natural warfare is understood with a natural mind, so spiritual warfare must be understood with a spiritual mind.

Many of us consider the battle in the spiritual realm to be a battle of God against Satan. But God has no enemies that pose a threat to Him. He is stronger than anyone or anything that opposes Him. The real battle in the spiritual world is between those who have submitted to God and those who are in rebellion against Him. Simply put, the battle is between submission and rebellion.

Mankind is not a pawn in a giant cosmic chess game. God has given us the ability to choose, and in our choosing we have repeatedly rebelled against God. The question every person must answer is whether or not they will be restored in relationship to God and learn to live in His Kingdom.

Your major battles in life are not against people and are never visible. They are against invisible spiritual powers of evil:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

In this verse we can identify at least four ranks of spiritual forces that battle against believers:

- Principalities: Territorial demonic forces.
- Powers: Spirits that establish spiritual strongholds and keep people in bondage.
- Rulers of darkness of this age: Demonic forces operating through evil leaders.
- Spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places: Forces that foster false religious systems and heretical teachings.

No one is exempt from this battle. All believers are engaged in this struggle. No one can view it from a distance. There is no neutral ground. You are in the midst of this conflict whether you acknowledge it or not.

Every day you enter this battlefield as you go to your place of employment, your business, or your school. Through what you are learning, you will be able to analyze this very real battle and understand its spiritual ramifications.

MAY 3 HOW THE WAR STARTED

The invisible war started in heaven with Lucifer, originally a beautiful angel created by God and exalted to a high place of prominence.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought. But they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. (Revelation 12:7-8)

The name Lucifer means "brightness" or that which "shines." The reason the enemy is no longer called by this name in Scripture is because his character has changed. He is now called Satan which means "adversary, accuser, or slanderer."

Lucifer arrogantly decided to try to take over God's Kingdom. The account of his rebellion is recorded in Isaiah 14:12-17 and in Ezekiel 28:12-19.

A group of angels joined Lucifer in this revolution. Lucifer and these sinful angels were cast out of heaven by God's holy angels and formed their own evil kingdom:

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:9)

Jesus witnessed this event taking place.

And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18)

Notice that Jesus did not say that He was involved in the battle. Remember that the battle is not between God and Satan, but rather between submission and rebellion. Those who have submitted themselves to God (holy angels and redeemed men) battle against those who have rebelled (fallen angels and unredeemed men).

Also note that it is Satan and his angels who fell, whereas man died. The Bible does not say that mankind is fallen. It says we are dead in our sins. The word "death" in Scripture means separation, meaning our sins have separated us from God:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 2:1-2)

You were dead in sin, but now you are alive to God. You no longer walk in the ways of this evil world or according to the dictates of your flesh. You know how the battle started, who was responsible for it, and what to do about it. This knowledge is preparing you to wage effective spiritual warfare.

MAY 4 A CONTINUING BATTLE

In Genesis 3, we learn that mankind's involvement in the invisible war started with yielding to temptation in the Garden of Eden. Satan influenced the first man, Adam, and his wife, Eve, to disobey God, thus birthing sin within the human race. Through sin, mankind joined Satan in his rebellion against God, and this resulted in men inheriting a nature opposed to God, an inherent tendency to constantly disobey Him:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

The sin nature with which a person is born is sometimes called the "Adamic nature "(after Adam), the "old nature," or the "flesh". This is the sinful mind-set that yearns to please your body at the expense of your spirit.

Because of sin, you were separated from God and condemned to death. Actually, you were subject to two deaths. The first death is the separation of the body from the soul and spirit. The second death is separation from the presence of God for eternity.

But you are no longer subject to death because God loves you so much that He made a special plan to save you from this dire fate:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

The death and resurrection of Jesus not only resulted in deliverance from sin and spiritual death, but it also initiated the defeat of Satan and his demons:

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

Jesus began the process for the final defeat of Satan through His ministry, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. He passed the responsibility for enforcing His victory to the Church, which is composed of all of those who have been born-again scripturally.

This present spiritual war will continue until the time of final judgment. This is why you must learn to war effectively against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The battle still continues and you are not exempt from the warfare.

MAY 5 THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF WARFARE

In order to fight effectively in the spiritual battle being waged on this planet, you must first trust Christ to save you. You must then become aware of the goals and motives of Satan and of the spiritual strategies for overcoming him and his evil forces. As this knowledge is attained, then you must apply it.

Satan's demons work diligently to keep believers from believing that they exist and knowing how they function. Keeping you ignorant of the reality of spiritual warfare is one of their major goals. The Apostle Paul said it is important to know the enemy's strategies...

*...lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.
(2 Corinthians 2:11)*

The call is to intelligent combat. Vital to understanding spiritual warfare is this basic principle:

We must recognize that the battles of life, whether spiritual, emotional, mental, financial, or relational are all outward manifestations of a direct or indirect spiritual cause.

Although in the natural world things often appear to be simply circumstances of life, the root causes of these events originate in the spiritual world.

Man has tried to correct the evils around him through education, legislation, demonstration, and strenuous effort, but all to no avail. The evils in this world are the results of underlying spiritual causes and they cannot be corrected by natural efforts.

Examine each of the following areas of your life and identify battles that you are facing:

- Physical
- Spiritual
- Emotional
- Mental
- Financial
- Relational

What spiritual factors are underlying your battles in these areas? Pray about this. Remember, as you analyze these factors, that behind every battle there is always a direct or an indirect spiritual cause.

MAY 6 THE WORLD AND THE FLESH

The world and the flesh are two powerful spiritual forces that can cause believers to live in disobedience to God and His Word. For the next few days, we will meditate on these in detail. When we understand and conquer these negative forces, then we can receive the positive input of the Holy Spirit. Remember: Negative and positive produces power!

When we speak of the world, we are talking about the godless world system and the attraction and appeal of its sinful kingdom. When we speak of the flesh, we are talking about the sinful characteristics of man's nature apart from the Word of God.

First, let us take a look at what is meant by "the world" in this context.. The Bible declares, *"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19)*. Satan is the prince of this world and as its prince he influences the governments of nations. He is described as a "deceiver of nations" in Revelation 20:3 and 7. Daniel chapter 10 mentions a demon active over the nation of Persia who was trying to hinder the answer to Daniel's prayer who was defeated by an angel of God.

Satan's activities are varied in the world, but they are always directed against God, His plan, and His people. Satan opposes God's plans and purposes, as is evident in his rebellion and fall from Heaven described in Ezekiel 28:12-19. Satan opposes the work of Jesus and is behind the anti-Christ spirit of the world:

*For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.
(2 John 7)*

Through cults, deceptive practices, and false teachers in the world, Satan tries to keep the Word of God from influencing the hearts and lives of men and women:

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Satan tempts believers to abandon the faith in order to embrace the world. Paul spoke of a believer named Demas who forsook him, *"Having loved this present world"* (2 Timothy 4:10). John warned: *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world"* (1 John 2:15).

Ask God to open your eyes to recognize and reject the appeal of the world.

MAY 7
THE APPEAL OF THE WORLD

Satan deceives the world through "spiritual wickedness in high places." He deceives through false doctrine, ministers, teachers, apostles, and cults in the religious structures of the world:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Satan tries to hinder believers from effective Christian service to the world: "*Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us*" (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Satan uses the appeal of the world to entice believers to sin. He tempts you through the environment, philosophy, and systems of the world. He fosters a love of the world in your heart in violation of the Word of God which declares:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (1 John 2:15-16)

Satan incites the world to persecute believers, but the Word says: "*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried...*" (Revelation 2:10).

In Luke 21, Jesus describes many of the end-time trials that will come upon the world, but then He declares:

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. (Luke 21:28)

The world is a strong force with its ungodly systems and its sensual allurements. But Jesus said:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

You are living in a sinful world. You are not exempt from the difficulties associated with this, but you can overcome the world because Jesus did!

MAY 8

THE ENEMY REVEALED

The names given to Satan in the Bible reveal much concerning his character and strategies.

Satan is called:

Abaddon (Hebrew word for a destroying angel):	Revelation 9:11
Accuser of the Brethren:	Revelation 12:10
Adversary:	1 Peter 5:8
Angel of bottomless pit:	Revelation 9:11
Angel of light:	2 Corinthians 11:4
Apollyon (Greek word for destroyer):	Revelation 9:11
Beelzebub:	Matthew 12:24; Luke 11:15
Belial:	2 Corinthians 6:15
Deceiver:	Revelation 12:9; 20:3
Destroyer:	Revelation 9:11
Devil (Means slanderer):	1 Peter 5:8; Matthew 4:1
Dragon:	Revelation 12:3
Enemy:	Matthew 13:39
Evil One:	1 John 5:19
God of this world:	2 Corinthians 4:4
King of Tyrus:	Ezekiel 28:12-15
Liar, father of lies:	John 8:44
Murderer:	John 8:44
Prince of the devils:	Matthew 12:24
Prince of this world:	John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11
Prince of the power of the air:	Ephesians 2:2
Satan (means adversary, to oppose):	John 13:27
Serpent:	Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 1:3
Tempter:	Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5
Roaring Lion:	1 Peter 5:8
Ruler of darkness:	Ephesians 6:12
Spirit that works in the children of disobedience:	Ephesians 2:2

Studying these names will make you more aware of how Satan operates in this world. During the next few days we will study one name, "roaring lion", in depth. Our meditations on this name will illustrate the importance of understanding each of the titles describing our enemy.

MAY 9 AS A ROARING LION

Let's look at one of Satan's names in detail. One way the enemy is described in the Word is as a roaring lion. We are warned to: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).*

Lions represent visible problems, while snakes represent concealed challenges. Some problems--like lions--are immediately recognizable. Others--like snakes which are often concealed in rocks or grass--are not as easily seen but are equally as deadly. The good news is that although you are surrounded by lions and snakes, as long as you abide in Christ you are safe.

The Bible uses many natural parallels to illustrate spiritual truths. For example, Jesus compared the spiritual needs of the world to a natural harvest field. He also drew spiritual analogies concerning the lilies of the field and the birds of the air to illustrate God's care for His people. Your adversary is not your mate, your kids, or your coworker. Your adversary is the devil and he is described as a roaring lion.

Peter indicates that Satan goes around seeking whom he may devour. The fact that Satan is seeking someone to devour means there are people who he may not devour because they are alert to his attacks. This passage, penned by Peter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will help you recognize and deal effectively with this "roaring lion". It will enable you to be one of those whom Satan cannot devour. Instead...

You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. (Psalm 91:13)

There are several spiritual parallels drawn from the analogy of lions. Here are two:

Lions are an adversary. If you meet a lion in the forest, he is your adversary! As a believer, you must recognize that Satan is your adversary and there is no neutral ground. He is out to destroy you!

Lions are nocturnal. They are especially active at night. Sinful places, sinful people, and places of spiritual darkness are Satan's domain. As a child of light, you should not be hanging out with sinful people in places of darkness.

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. (Ephesians 5:8-11)

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MAY 10
AS A ROARING LION
(Continued)

We are looking in-depth at the spiritual application of one of Satan's names, "roaring lion." We learned yesterday that lions are adversarial and nocturnal. Here are some additional analogies:

Lions lie in wait for their prey. So does Satan. He is just waiting to prey on your weakness. He works through familiar spirits--spirits that are familiar with what strategies work on you. This is why you must always be alert to what is going on around you spiritually so you won't "... *give place to the devil*" (*Ephesians 4:27*). Don't let Satan get his foot in the door!

Lions isolate their prey. On safaris into lion country, as long as you remain in the truck with the other tourists you are safe. If you step outside of the truck, you are isolated and become prey for the lions. Lions chase a herd of animals, then they attack the weak or sick animal that separates from the herd. Spiritually, Satan wants to separate you from other believers through strife, confusion, and misunderstanding. Don't allow him to do this or you will become vulnerable to his attacks. The term "in Christ" is used repeatedly in the King James Version of the New Testament. You will be safe if you abide in Christ as part of a body of true believers. When you walk independently of Christ and the Church, you will eventually be devoured by the enemy.

Lions are territorial. Lions guard their territory and attack to gain new territory. When they are seeking to seize new territory or take over a pride of lions, they roar. A roaring lion is a dangerous lion. Satan is all about territory also. He wants to invade the territory of your marriage, your home, your emotions, your city, and your nation. Set a spiritual guard over your marriage, your children, your emotions, your ministry, etc. This will not make you immune to attacks, but it will prepare you to conquer this spiritual lion when he attacks. It is important that you do not spend time in the devil's den, so to speak--like bars, drug houses, and other demonic environments. Also, be especially alert when you are invading new spiritual territory to advance the Gospel because you are challenging Satan's turf.

Lions are set on total destruction. Lions devour their prey. When a lion takes control of a pride of lions, he kills all the cubs so that the young ones birthed will be of his bloodline. Satan comes to kill, steal, and destroy you and your generations. Ezekiel 22:25 says that like a roaring lion, the enemy devours souls, treasures, and precious things. Satan wants to give birth to evil in your life through lust because "...*every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*" (*James 1:14-15*). The Amplified Version renders this as "*lust conceives and gives birth to sin.*" Do not let Satan kill and destroy your dreams. Do not let Satan give birth to the "cubs" of bitterness, hatred, unforgiveness, addictions, etc., in your life.

MAY 11
AS A ROARING LION
(Continued)

We are looking in-depth at the spiritual application of one of Satan's names, "roaring lion." So far we have learned that:

- Lions are adversarial.
- Lions are nocturnal.
- Lions lie in wait for their prey.
- Lions isolate their prey.
- Lions are territorial.
- Lions are set on total destruction.

Here are some additional analogies:

Lions attack if you turn and run. Do not retreat from your spiritual enemy or he will attack with a vengeance. Face the enemy in the power of the Lord. David faced a giant and did not retreat. A man named Benaiah killed two lion-like men and became known as a mighty man of God (2 Samuel 23:20-22 and 1 Chronicles 11:22). Gideon faced a massive army with only 300 soldiers and was victorious (Judges 7:7). These fearless men did not retreat. What could you do for God if you do not retreat? Fear is what causes retreat--which leads us to the next point.

Lions roar to instill fear in their prey. Faith energizes you to do great things for God. Fear paralyzes you. Paul declared, *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"* (2 Timothy 1:7). Fear is not of God, so rebuke it and reject it in the name of the Lord.

Lions beget lions. If you do not deal with the lions in your life--the addictions, wrong attitudes and emotions, and sins--then they will give birth to additional spiritual lions that will prey upon you.

Joshua did not eliminate all of the giants in the Promised Land as God commanded. Had he done so, there never would have been a Goliath to rise up and challenge God's people. Goliath came from Gath where a "few giants" were allowed to remain (Joshua 11:22). Giants beget giants just as lions beget lions. Unresolved lust conceives sin, which--when finished--results in death (James 1:15).

Tomorrow you will learn strategies for dealing with the roaring lion.

MAY 12
AS A ROARING LION
(Continued)

Peter outlines four major strategies that protect us from the attacks of the roaring lion:

Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour. Withstand him; be firm in faith [against his onset--rooted, established, strong, immovable, and determined], knowing that the same (identical) sufferings are appointed to your brotherhood (the whole body of Christians) throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:8-9, AMP)

First, you must be self-controlled. Peter tell us to be sober, which means to be in control. He says to be temperate, which means all things should be done in moderation. When you are bound by drugs, alcohol, anger, unforgiveness, etc., you are not in control. You are not sober spiritually when you allow these things to control you.

Second, you must be vigilant. Peter commands that we are to be "...*be vigilant and cautious at all times*". Vigilance means to be watchful and cautious. A tragic, but relevant example, is the 911 terrorist attack on America. Before this attack, Americans were not vigilant in their defense strategies, especially in terms of airport security. After 911, the United State became more vigilant because they finally realized there are enemies in the world whose aim is to destroy their nation

Third, you must withstand Satan in the faith. Peter commands us to "*withstand him; be firm in faith [against his onset--rooted, established, strong, immovable, and determined]*." To do this, you must know the basics of your faith. The foundations of your faith are listed in Hebrews 6:1-3 and include repentance from dead works, faith toward God, the doctrine of baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (If you are not familiar with these, obtain the Harvestime course entitled "*Foundations of Faith*" for further study.)

Fourth, you must not isolate yourself. Don't spend time wondering "why me"? Peter says to realize that the same battles you are facing are being experienced by others. In the natural world, lions attack when an animal becomes isolated from the herd. The same is true in the spiritual world. Remain close to your Christian brothers and sisters and get connected with a local body of believers. They will help you ward off many attacks from spiritual lions because they have faced similar challenges.

Satan is "as a roaring lion", but now you have learned the strategies to successfully confront his threats. Do not run from his roar. Run towards it and conquer the lion in the name of the Lord!

MAY 13 UNDER YOUR FEET

In Psalm 91:13, lions and powerful young lions are depicted as being under your feet. The Word declares: *"Thou shalt tread upon the lion... the young lion...shalt thou trample under feet."*

Yes, you live among spiritual lions but you have power over them and all the power of the enemy: Jesus said, *"Behold, I give unto you power...over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* (Luke 10:19).

Satan is an imitator. Peter describes him *"as a roaring lion."* Did you know that Jesus is actually called the Lion of Judah? That is the name by which He is referred to in Revelation 5:5--and when our Lion roars, the seven thunders will utter their voices and God's plan will be fulfilled!

The only times in scripture that lions were successful in their attacks was when people were sinning, backsliding, and turning away from God. (For examples see Jeremiah 5:6 and 1 Kings 13:24.)

To those who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, God promises, *"Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet"* (Psalm 91:13). But remember that this promise is to those who are abiding in the secret place, consistently living in God's presence and according to the dictates of His Word (Psalm 91:1).

Have you allowed spiritual lions to cause you to retreat? Have you been ignorant of Satan's strategies? Have you been fearful of his roars and isolated yourself from other believers? Have you been hanging out in places of darkness where spiritual lions congregate?

The deception is over! You now recognize that Satan is as a roaring lion and you have biblical strategies to combat him. The Apostle Paul declared that he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. You can have the same testimony (2 Timothy 4:17).

Spend some time today meditating on The Message translation of 1Peter 5:8-9:

Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up. You're not the only ones plunged into these hard times. It's the same with Christians all over the world. So keep a firm grip on the faith. The suffering won't last forever. It won't be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ--eternal and glorious plans they are--will have you put together and on your feet for good. He gets the last word; yes, he does.

MAY 14

A SERPENT

The analogy of lions discussed in the previous devotions represents the easily recognizable spiritual threats, trials, and attacks that you confront in the world. But Satan is also called a serpent, and snakes represent hidden dangers. These challenges are concealed--like snakes hidden in grass or rocks--but they are equally as deadly as lions.

To understand the meaning of the analogy behind this name of Satan we must go back to the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden where the enemy first appeared in the form of a snake (Genesis 3:1-7). Satan used the physical form of a serpent to lead mankind into sin. From this point on, serpents--snakes--are used in scripture to represent evil. The Apostle Paul makes reference to this in 2 Corinthians 11:3 when he cautions, *"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."*

Using the natural example of snakes, there are numerous spiritual parallels that may be drawn to help us gain understanding of the strategies of the enemy. For example, the venom released by poisonous snakes when they attack affects your nerves, your blood, and your heart. Satan also attacks in these three areas. He attacks your nerve--your courage to live for God and fulfill your divine mandate. He attacks the work of the cross, trying to sabotage every benefit of Christ's blood in your life. He also targets your heart, trying to get your focus and affections on things of the world.

Snakes in the natural world are difficult to see because they are disguised to look like the dirt, rocks, grass or trees in which they dwell. Likewise, Satan is also deceptive. He subtly blends right in as he sets his traps for you. Some species of snakes in the natural world make frightening sounds by hissing or rattling. This is true in the spiritual world also. Satan will bring terrifying and anxious thoughts to mind in order to generate fear. God has not given you a spirit of fear however, so if fear is not of God you know exactly where it is coming from (2 Timothy 1:7).

A snake captures its food in four different ways: Through a swift strike; by throwing its weight around its prey to overcome it; by holding the target in its fangs until the poison venom paralyzes it; and through constriction where it wraps itself around the victim and slowly squeezes out its life. Do you see how these methods parallel those used by Satan in spiritual attacks? Sometimes Satan attacks with swift and deadly strikes. Other times he tries to squeeze the life out of you spiritually by the cares of the world and sinful weights and entanglements. Satan is always trying to "throw his weight around" to terrorize you. He especially wants to paralyze you with the deadly venom of bitterness, unforgiveness, anger, etc.

You need not fear your enemy, the serpent, however, because Jesus promised, *"I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* (Luke 10:19).

MAY 15 AVOIDING SNAKEBITE

Satan is called a serpent and yesterday we considered analogies from the natural world and applied them spiritually to better understand this name. Today we consider some ways to avoid snakebites in the natural world that are also applicable in the spiritual realm:

Learn to recognize poisonous snakes. Spiritually, you must be able to recognize your enemy and understand his devious tactics.

Wear protective clothing. You must appropriate the spiritual armor listed in Ephesians 6:11-18.

Avoid known snake territory. Avoid environments of temptation and Satanic activity like bars, drug houses, and places where the occult is operative.

Walk with a friend. It is important to be part of a local church and connected to in the Body of Christ. Christian friends can help you through difficult times of Satanic attack.

Avoid walking in the dark. Snakes avoid direct sunlight and conceal themselves in the dark. As believers, we are no longer to walk as children of darkness, but as children of light: *"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all "* (1 John 1:5).

Do not run. Snakes strike when they sense sudden movement. Spiritually, you must never retreat from Satan. Resist him and he will flee from you! Remember God's promise: *"You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot"* (Psalm 91:13).

Do not go out of your way to kill a snake. Thousands of people are bitten each year because they try to kill snakes without knowing anything about their habits or habitats. As a believer, you are to resist the devil when he attacks and deliver those you encounter along the way who have been victimized by him. You are to go into all the world with the Gospel. As you do, you have power to deal with demonic forces as you encounter them, but you are not to deliberately seek them out.

Know what to do in case of snakebite. In case of snakebite, an anti-venom should be administered as soon as possible. Spiritually, this is a great illustration of the work of the cross of Jesus Christ in freeing you from the poison infused by the venom of sin. If you have experienced a spiritual snakebite, you need not succumb to it. Let the anti-venom of the blood of Jesus infuse your life and it will totally cleanse you from the deadly venom of sin.

In the past few days we have explored the meaning of two of Satan's names: Roaring lion and serpent. As you have seen, understanding these names enables you to better recognize Satan's strategies. Go back to the devotion for May 8th and take time to study the spiritual analogies behind some of his other names.

MAY 16

THE FLESH

During the first part of this month, you have learned how Satan works through the world. You also learned to recognize how he works by understanding the meaning of his names.

It was the appeal of the world that drew Israel's focus back to Egypt. That was the only world that they knew. The people remembered only what they perceived to be the good things--the leeks, garlic, and onions. Somehow, they forgot the slavery that accompanied these things. And that is the way the world works. The appeal of the "good life" overshadows the fact that you will be living in bondage if you embrace it.

Equally powerful to the world is the appeal of the flesh, our subject for the next few days. The body, soul, and spirit of man are closely related. Because of this, Satan attacks your soul and spirit through your flesh.

This strategy is evident in the first temptation. Eve "saw" (*fleshly vision*) the tree was good for food (*fleshly taste*), and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be "desired" (*lust of the flesh*) to make one wise. Then she took of it and gave it to her husband (Genesis 3:6). Satan used fleshly senses and desires to gain access to Eve's mind, heart, soul, and spirit.

The Apostle Peter warned: "...Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Satan also uses your flesh to affect your mind:

*But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
(Romans 7:23)*

"My members", as used in this verse, refers to the flesh. Satan also uses your flesh to affect your spirit:

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Note that you are the one who must take action to cleanse yourself of the filthiness of the flesh. Your part is to confess and forsake sin. God's part is to forgive and restore you. When you confess your known sins, God not only forgives you of those you have acknowledged, but He also forgives you of all unrighteousness:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

MAY 17
SOWING AND REAPING

Paul said, “*So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God*” (Romans 8:8). It is impossible for you to please God while you are still walking after the flesh, motivated by your carnal nature and fulfilling the lusts of your flesh. The word “flesh” is translated from the Greek word, *sarx*, which refers to man’s unregenerate carnal nature with its unbridled passions, desires, and lusts.

There are many believers today who are living in defeat because they are yielding to the lusts of their flesh. They are trying to keep one foot in the world and one foot in the church. Their hearts are divided. They want to serve God and enjoy His blessings, but they also want to enjoy worldly pleasures and satisfy the lusts of their flesh.

These erring believers are bound by habits, selfish and immoral desires, and impure thoughts. Instead of denying their flesh, they are yielding to it. Many have deceived themselves into believing they can continue to indulge in fulfilling the lusts of their flesh without reaping any consequences.

The truth is, as long as you are walking after the flesh you cannot please God. The Apostle Paul warned that if we sow to the flesh we will reap corruption, but if we walk according to the dictates of the Holy Spirit, we will reap eternal life. He warned:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (Galatians 6:7-8).

Do not be deceived. If you live your life according to the dictates of your carnal flesh, you will reap corruption.

-If you sow sexual immorality, you will reap heartache and the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual consequences of immorality.

-If you sow gossip, slander, backbiting, and strife, you will reap the same.

-If you sow hatred, anger, pride, jealousy, greed, and selfishness, this will be your harvest.

Think about it: Are you sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit? Remember that whatever you sow today, you will eventually reap.

MAY 18 THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

The sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21 are not all of the sins identified in the Bible. They are a specific group of sins called "works of the flesh". An understanding of these sins will help you war against their attacks in your life. Here is the list:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Over the next few days we will take a look at these works of the flesh. Remember that we are eliminating the negatives so we can embrace the positives and manifest spiritual power in our lives.

Adultery is sexual intercourse by a married person with someone who is not their spouse. One of the first ten commandments from God was: "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*" (Exodus 20:14). Both Jesus and Paul repeated the warning against adultery in the New Testament (Mark 10:19 and Romans 13:9).

Jesus expanded the meaning of adultery to include evil sexual desires of the heart and mind:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

When a person commits adultery he is sinning against his own soul: "*But whoso comitteth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul*" (Proverbs 6:32). God will judge those who commit adultery (Hebrews 13:4) and they will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9).

If you are in an adulterous relationship, get out of it today! If you are engaging in pornography or lustful thinking, that is the same as adultery. Confess your sin and ask God to forgive you. Admit it, then quit it!

MAY 19
THE WORKS OF THE FLESH
(Continued)

We are learning about the works of the flesh so we can be victorious against them.

Fornication is sexual intercourse by two people who are not married to each other. Fornication also includes sexual deviations such as homosexuality, incest, etc. The Bible tells us to abstain from fornication: *"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (1 Thessalonians 4:3)*. The body is not intended for fornication because it belongs to the Lord. For this reason, you must flee fornication:

Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:13,18-20)

Uncleanness is another work of the flesh. Simply stated, it is the opposite of being morally clean. In regards to the works of the flesh, the word "uncleanness" means being spiritually or morally unclean. The Bible declares: *"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7)*. It is your responsibility to mortify uncleanness and discipline yourself to live a holy life (Colossians 3:5). If you do not mortify uncleanness then you will yield to it. Paul said: *"...for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Romans 6:19)*.

Lasciviousness is the sin of lust, sensual emotions, and lewdness. It is filthy and shameless conduct. The Bible teaches that if you continue to be lascivious, you will eventually give yourself over to it without conscience: *"Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness..." (Ephesians 4:19)*.

Examine your life regarding these powerful forces of the flesh. Remember that you have supernatural, God-given power over all the power of the enemy. You do not have to continue to struggle with these sins.

MAY 20
THE WORKS OF THE FLESH
(Continued)

We are on a spiritual mission to destroy the works of the flesh. Today, we continue our quest.

Idolatry is the worship of idols. This does not just mean the worship of images made out of stone, wood, or precious metals. An idol is anything that is more important to you than God. Who are your heroes? What occupies your thoughts and time? Do you have a relationship that you value more than God? Idolatry is the lack of acknowledgment of the rightful position of God in your life. One of the first commandments given by God concerned idolatry: *"Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:4).*

Witchcraft includes white and black magic, sorcery, astrology, voodoo, and the use of potions, spells, enchantments, and drugs. It includes all Satanic practices and worship. The meaning of witchcraft can be expanded to include controlling and manipulating others. Even though you are not involved in Satanic witchcraft, you can be guilty of witchcraft as a sin of the flesh if you attempt to manipulate and control people or pray curses on them. Witchcraft is spiritual rebellion against God. God says the sin of rebellion is as bad as witchcraft *"...For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Samuel 15:23).*

Hatred is an emotion of intense dislike and evil attitudes or feelings towards others.

Variance is disagreement, disharmony, and dissension. It is similar to strife. This word is used only one other place in the Bible; when Jesus speaks of disharmony in the family as a sign of the last days of time (Matthew 10:35).

Emulation is the desire to copy others in order to equal or excel them. It is a spirit of rivalry and a form of jealousy. This passage in Galatians is the only reference in the Bible where the word is used in this manner (Galatians 5:19-21).

Wrath is violent anger, an angry act, or expressed rage. You should put off wrath as you would take off a dirty garment (Colossians 3:8). A man filled with wrath stirs up strife, and that brings us to the next work of the flesh...

Strife is quarreling, fighting, or conflict. It means a clash or dispute. In addition to wrath causing strife, hatred (Proverbs 10:12) and anger (Proverbs 29:22) also cause it. Scornful men cause strife (Proverbs 22:10) and foolish questions result in it (2 Timothy 2:23) Strife is a carnal work of the flesh (James 3:14,16).

Examine your life for evidence of any of these works of the flesh.

MAY 21
THE WORKS OF THE FLESH
(Continued)

Today we conclude our list of works of the flesh.

Sedition is the stirring up of unrest or discord. This passage on the works of the flesh is one of the few where this term is used in the Bible.

Heresies are beliefs contrary to the Word of God. They are opinions of man which are in error and lead to division in the church.

Envy is resentment over the spiritual, financial, or material blessings of others.

Murder is taking the life of another with willful malice and forethought. Murder is not the same as self-defense or an accidental killing. The New Testament expands the meaning of murder to include hatred: *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him"* (1 John 3:15).

Drunkenness is the condition of having your mental and physical faculties affected by intoxication, whether it be alcohol or drugs.

Revelling is to engage and delight in worldly pleasures, to participate in worldly and boisterous merry-making or festivities. It is riotous, wild, uncontrolled living.

Here is the composite list of the works of the flesh we have studied during the past few days:

Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and revellings.

Paul describes the results of the works of the flesh: *"...of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:21).

God has provided a way to avoid this penalty and to be forgiven and delivered from the works of the flesh: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). You can be free from the works of the flesh and learn to walk in the Spirit. More on this tomorrow.

MAY 22 WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

How does one refrain from doing the sinful works of the flesh? Here are six steps to take:

First: Repent of your sin by accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior: *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). God does not take a sinful man and give him a self-improvement course. He creates a new creature. Old things pass away and he is made new in Christ.

Second: Realize that you cannot be freed from the works of the flesh through your own effort:

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (Romans 7:15-19)

Third: Be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who will enable you to walk in the ways of the Spirit instead of the sinful ways of the flesh.

Fourth: Walk according to the dictates of the Holy Spirit instead of your flesh: *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh"* (Galatians 5:17).

Fifth: When you fail, do not live in condemnation. Paul eventually came to learn:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death... That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. (Romans 8:1-9)

Paul experienced difficulties in living a holy life initially, but he continued to pursue this goal despite his failures. His victory over the flesh is recorded in Romans 8. Whenever you sin, confess it immediately and ask the Holy Spirit to help you overcome it. This is how you learn to walk in the Spirit.

Sixth: Replace the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The next few devotions will show you how to do this.

MAY 23 THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

We have studied about the negatives--the works of the flesh. Now it is time for some positive input so we can produce spiritual power!

Your carnal nature must be replaced by the fruit of Christ-like qualities. The Fruit of the Holy Spirit refers to the nature of the Spirit revealed in the life of a believer. This fruit consists of spiritual qualities which should be evident in the lives of all Christians. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for power. The Fruit of the Holy Spirit is for character in the life of a believer

Spiritual fruit is evidence of spiritual maturity. Like fruit in the natural world, it is a product which is the result of the process of life. Spiritual fruit is godly character in both personal and social conduct and is evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in your life and your response to this work. Just as fruit takes time to develop in the natural world, spiritual fruit takes time to develop. It is the product of growth in your spiritual life.

The Bible speaks of positive spiritual qualities produced in the life of a believer by the Holy Spirit and contrasts these with the works of the flesh:

... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

The word "fruit" is singular. It is not plural (fruits). It can be understood by the natural example of grapes. A cluster of grapes has several individual grapes on it, but it is one cluster. In the natural world when grapes are picked from the vine they are picked in a cluster. This cluster of several grapes is called the "fruit" (singular) of the vine.

In the spiritual world, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is similar to a cluster of grapes. Each fruit, like each grape, is a separate entity, yet all are joined together in one cluster or fruit. This one fruit is spiritual maturity which is revealed in the form of many Christ-like qualities.

God wants all believers to have the fruit of the Spirit evident in their lives. What about you? Does your life demonstrate the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness faith, meekness, and temperance?

MAY 24
THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT
(Continued)

The following is a list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the Christ-like qualities that God wants to develop in your life:

Love is an emotion of deep affection, care, and concern. It is an unconditional giving of self to others regardless of their condition or response.

Joy is a quality of gladness, delight, and jubilation. The spiritual fruit of joy and the emotion of happiness are not the same. Each springs from a different source. Happiness comes from the world around you and depends upon your circumstances. Joy originates with the Spirit of God and does not depend upon outward circumstances.

Peace is a condition of quiet, calm, tranquility, and harmony. It is the absence of strife, anxiety, and concern.

Longsuffering is the quality of patience. It is the ability to cheerfully bear an unbearable situation and patiently endure.

Goodness refers to a holy quality of character as well as right actions.

Gentleness is the quality of having a mild manner, not being severe, violent, or loud. It is a quiet and respectful kindness.

Faith as a fruit refers to character. It is developed through the process of His life within you bringing spiritual growth that makes you a faithful person in relationships, work, ministry, and in your relationship with God.

Meekness is controlled strength.

Temperance is self-control and moderation in emotions, thoughts, and actions.

Review this list of positive spiritual qualities. Are they evident in your life?

MAY 25 DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL FRUIT

Jesus used the term "fruit" of the Spirit as a natural parallel of a spiritual truth. Certain conditions are necessary to produce fruit in the natural world. These conditions are spiritual parallels of things necessary for production of spiritual fruit. In the natural world, as well as the spiritual realm, there are specific conditions necessary to assure growth. These include the following:

Life: The first requirement for developing the Fruit of the Spirit is life. Just as life in the natural world comes through seed, life in the spiritual world came through the seed of Jesus Christ. That seed of life, Jesus Christ, must be living in you.

Water: Water is necessary to produce fruit in the natural world. Water is one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit and this spiritual water is necessary to produce fruit in the spirit world. The water of the Word quenches your spiritual thirst and brings spiritual growth (John 7:38-39; Isaiah 44:3).

Light: It is a plant's response to light that stimulates growth in the natural fruit-bearing process. It is your response to the light the truths of God's Word that produces the Fruit of the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

Air: Carbon dioxide is drawn in by the natural plant from the air which surrounds it. This is necessary for growth and fruit production. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is compared to air or wind (John 3:8). The "wind" of the Holy Spirit blowing across your life is much like the wind in the natural world. It scatters the seeds of the Word of God, separates the wheat from the chaff in your spiritual life, and fans the dying coals of your spiritual zeal to set you ablaze for God.

Space: In Matthew 13 in the parable of the sower, competition for space choked out some plants. The believer who develops spiritual fruit will discover he must be set apart from the competition of the world (Matthew 13:22). God clears space around you--sets you apart from the world--to permit you to grow spiritually (Hosea 14:5-8).

Root system: Roots are necessary to anchor and supply nutrients to the plant. Psalms chapter 1 tells how to develop the root system in your spiritual life: *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper"* (Psalms 1:1-3).

Rest: Dormancy occupies a specific season in the natural growth-cycle of plants. It is a period of rest during which the plant may appear to be dead because there is no apparent growth. Dormancy usually occurs right before a period of very rapid growth. How are you responding to the life of Christ within you? Are you receiving spiritual water, light, air and rest? Have you allowed space to develop a good root system, or is your life filled with the flesh and the world?

MAY 26
DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL FRUIT
(continued)

We are studying natural parallels of spiritual truths regarding the development of spiritual fruit. Yesterday we learned of the necessity of life, light, water, air, space, a good root system, and rest. Here are some additional analogies of components necessary for spiritual growth:

Soil: Both in the natural and spiritual worlds, in order to produce fruit the ground must be properly prepared. In the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, it was the condition of the soil that affected the growth of the seed. Your heart is like soil in the natural world. If your heart is hard and filled with things of the world that choke out the Word of God, you will not bear spiritual fruit

Death: *"Every time you plant a seed, you sow something that does not come to life [germinating, springing up, and growing] unless it dies first" (1 Corinthians 15:36, AMP).* Spiritual life depends on death to the things of the world. It requires death to sin, worldly desires, and pleasures. Death to the world results in the development of the fruit of Christ-likeness in your life.

Attached to the vine: In order to bear fruit in the natural world a branch must be attached to the main plant. If the branch is broken off from the main life-giving vine it will not bear fruit. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. In order to bear spiritual fruit we must maintain our relationship to Jesus Christ, the true vine (John 15:1-5).

Pruning: When a farmer prunes a plant, he cuts off the unproductive branches in order to make the plant produce more fruit. He removes everything which would hinder the growth of the plant. Pruning is also necessary in the spiritual world. Spiritual pruning is correction by God. The Bible also calls it chastisement. When God "prunes" He removes from your life everything which would hinder your spiritual growth (John 15:2). Sometimes you do not reap the benefits of pruning because you blame Satan when God is actually the one bringing circumstances into your life to correct and prune you (Hosea 6:1).

Climate: Climate is important in the development of fruit. In the natural world, many types of fruit are developed in environments that are specially controlled. They are grown in buildings called "hot houses" at specific temperatures. They are protected from the real environment of the outside world. If you take a "hot house" plant and move it outside, it will soon die because it has lived only in a controlled environment. The plant cannot withstand the environment of the real world. Spiritually speaking, we do not want "hot house" Christians who look good in controlled settings but wilt on contact with the real world. Spiritual fruit should be just as evident in your contacts with the world as it is in the controlled settings of your Christian friends and the church.

Take some time to reflect on each of these natural parallels in regards to the development of spiritual fruit in your life.

MAY 27
THE MODEL OF OBEDIENCE

Jesus is our greatest model of how to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. Everything Jesus did was an act of obedience to His Father's will. He did not come to earth on His own initiative. He came in obedience to His Father's will. When Jesus came to earth He said, *"I have come to do your will, O God"* (Hebrews 10:7, NIV).

Jesus denied Himself of heaven's beauties and privileges and took upon Himself human form in order to fulfill God's will (Philippians 2:7). He was subject to human nature and emotions and was *"...in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus was obedient unto death. His obedience was not fifty percent, not twenty-five percent, not ninety-nine percent, but one-hundred percent obedience to do the will of His Father. It was His obedience that made it possible for Him to draw on all of heaven's resources and win the ultimate victory over Satan.

The obedience that Jesus modeled for us involved a determination to do God's will regardless of the cost. Jesus said:

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. (John 5:30)

Because Jesus was willing to live in total submission to God's will, He requires the same of believers. The call Jesus makes is clear: "Follow me"--meaning follow my example, follow me in total obedience to God.

To follow Jesus, our model, in like obedience...

- You must have an ear to hear God's voice and when He speaks, you must be quick to obey.
- You must be determined to do God's will regardless of the cost. The driving force behind all of your actions must be to do His will.
- You must be willing to be obedient unto death, giving up all claims to your life.
- You must develop a wholesome fear of a righteous and holy God who requires one-hundred percent obedience.
- You must have a fervent, undying love for Christ that will motivate you to follow Him in total obedience.

Determine that you will follow the example of Jesus and live in complete obedience to God.

MAY 28 TOTAL OBEDIENCE

Moses told Israel that because of they had refused to enter the Promised Land, God would not go to battle with them. Nevertheless, Israel persisted in their rebellious plan and advanced into battle depending upon their own strength to deliver them from their enemies.

Satan's strategy is to cause you to reject God's Word and follow your own way. He will deceive you into compromising what God has told you to do and make you think you have obeyed God when you are actually following your own self-will. When God told Israel to advance into the land, they retreated. When He told them to retreat, they decided to advance.

In the Old Testament account of King Saul, God instructed him to attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belonged to them including their livestock. Saul disobeyed and instead of destroying everything as God had commanded, he spared the best of the sheep, the cattle, and lambs.

God told Samuel, *"I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions..."* (1 Samuel 15:11, NIV). When we refuse to allow our lives to be governed by God and His Word and choose to live as we please, we have actually rejected God and turned away from Him.

Early the next morning Samuel went to see Saul. When he reached him, Saul said, *"The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions"* (1 Samuel 15:13, NIV).

Saul was deceived. He thought he had obeyed God. Samuel asked: *"What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"* (1 Samuel 15:14, NIV).

Saul tried to justify his actions. He answered, *"The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest"* (1 Samuel 15:15, NIV).

Saul did not accept responsibility for his disobedience. He was in authority over the soldiers and had the ability to command them to do whatever he desired. The soldiers did not make him disobey God. No man or woman has the power to make you disobey God. You disobey by an act of your own will.

God doesn't want just ninety-five percent obedience. A man who is ninety-five percent faithful to his wife is one-hundred percent unfaithful to her. Are you walking in total, one-hundred percent obedience to God? It is the only way to be victorious over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

MAY 29
YOU OWE A DEBT

In Romans 8:12-15, the Apostle Paul said if you live according to the flesh and are continually yielding to the lusts and desires of it you will die. But if you are crucifying your flesh, living in the Spirit, continually denying and putting to death the flesh, and walking after the things of the Spirit, you will experience new life:

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:12-15)

Due to the tremendous sacrifice Christ made on the cross as the sinless Son of God, we owe a great debt. We are all debtors to God. We are debtors to the Spirit of God who lives within us. We have an obligation to no longer live our lives to please our fleshly desires, but rather live to please Him.

A major strategy to demolish the barrier of the flesh is to crucify it--to utterly destroy it. You cannot do this in your own limited strength. You must draw upon the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit to continually put to death every thought, every fleshly desire, and every evil work of the flesh. Once you have broken through the barrier of your carnal flesh and have crucified it, you will be able to bring every area of your life under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Take some time right now to think about any areas of your life where you have been yielding to your flesh. Think about any carnal, fleshly desires or habits that are hindering you from walking in the fullness of the Spirit and from taking hold of God's promises.

Do not hesitate one minute longer! Get rid of these things in your life! Put them to death. Ask God to cleanse you from all works of the flesh. Continually exercise the power and authority Christ has given you and, through the Holy Spirit, get rid of every trace of them.

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.
(Galatians 5:24)

According to these passages in Romans and Galatians, you are to mortify and crucify the deeds of the flesh. You are not a victim of the world, the flesh, and the devil. You can exert supernatural power over these forces. Jesus Christ died for you and you owe a debt. This debt can only be fulfilled by accepting His sacrifice and living life in the Spirit rather than the flesh.

MAY 30

CAUGHT OFF GUARD

During this month you have confronted major strongholds that stand in the way of claiming your spiritual inheritance: The world, the flesh, and the devil. Be aware that Satan will continually try to catch you off guard and attack you through these avenues.

King David, one of the most powerful men of God in the Bible who was called a man after God's own heart, fell victim to Satan's trap. Satan often tempts you after you have experienced a great spiritual victory. This was the case with David. He was tempted at a time of prosperity in the kingdom. He was the king of Jerusalem, lived in a beautiful palace on Mount Zion, had a royal court, and a powerful army.

At the time appointed for kings to go to battle, David decided to remain in Jerusalem. He had fought and won many battles and apparently he decided it was time to relax. Have you noticed that when everything seems to be going well, there is money in the bank, circumstances are good, and things are going smoothly, it is easy it is to slack off in your prayer time and Bible study? If you do this however, over a period of time a spirit of complacency sets in and you become an easy target for Satan.

In your spiritual battle against Satan there is no time to relax and let down your guard. The moment you begin to cut back on your prayer time, stop reading the Word, and fail to watch for Satan's attacks--the devil will seize the opportunity to catch you off guard.

This is exactly what happened to David. Satan set the temptation right in front of David in the form of a beautiful woman and he had illicit sexual relations with her. When she was found to be pregnant, he tried to cover it up and eventually resorted to murder to conceal his sin. Eventually, when confronted with his transgression, David repented and was forgiven although he still suffered the consequences of his sin.

Learn from David's experience. Do not relax your guard. Do not let down on your prayer and Bible study. Guard what you hear and see. Do not let evil thoughts and desires enter your heart and mind. You must be on guard if you are to conquer the flesh. You must be in control through the power of the Holy Spirit if you are to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Remain ever vigilant. Walk in obedience to God's Word, reject the appeals of the world, the desires of the flesh, and resist the strategies of the devil. Do not let your gaze linger on the things of the world, rather keep your eyes on your destiny: *"Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil"* (Proverbs 4:25-27, NIV).

MAY 31
THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL

In Ephesians 4 where Paul deals with the sins of the flesh in the context of the old man and the new man, he inserts this warning: *"Neither give place to the Devil" (Ephesians 4:27)*. This warning indicates that when you commit sins of the flesh, you give place--literally a claim--to Satan in your life.

As you have learned during the past month, the world, the flesh, and the devil with his demons combine their evil forces to war against you. Each force can operate independently, but these three forces of evil are often combined in their attacks. Satan uses the world with its illusions, charms, philosophies, and ungodly systems, to gain access to your flesh. He uses your flesh to gain access to your soul, mind, and spirit. Then he tries to conform you to the world rather than to God.

So how do you combat the forces of the world and the flesh: The Apostle Paul declares:

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

You are not to be conformed to the world, its philosophies, and its standards. You are not to yield to the appeal of the flesh. You are to present yourself to God--body, mind, heart, soul, and spirit. You are to be transformed by continually renewing your mind in the Word of God.

You must present yourself to God as an act of your own will. In the Old Testament when a sacrifice was given to God, the person who offered it had no further control over it. It was given totally to the Lord. Instead of conforming to the world and the flesh, you must be transformed--totally changed--by the renewing of your mind.

God has equipped you with spiritual weapons to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:4-6)

Your quest to achieve destiny demands obedience. It demands transformation. You are in the world, but you cannot be of it if you are to receive the manifested promises of God in your life. You are in the flesh, but you need not operate in the flesh. The devil is real, but he has no power over you. You have the supernatural, God-given power to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.