



THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)

The heart of our problem in our nation today—in our lives, families, churches, and communities—can be captured and summarized in these verses found in 2 Chronicles 15, a portion of God’s Word talking about ancient Israel:

For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. . . . In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. (vv. 3, 5–6)

The first thing missing was “the true God.”

The Israelites had not become atheists. Nor was their attendance at the temple down. The sacrificial fires continued to burn. Yet despite all of their religious activity, Israel had lost a correct view of the true God.

They wanted a convenient God, one they could control. They wanted a kingdom without a King. They wanted a figurehead, a puppet with the trappings of kingship only. Yet any god or king you can boss around isn’t the true God, or the true King. The true God does not adjust to you. You adjust to Him.

Our culture doesn’t want the true God either. Our culture wants to pay homage only—to offer a nice little prayer before public meetings.

Yet any time we simply pay homage without aligning our thoughts and actions under God, we are reinforcing our culture’s false view of God as a harmless deity who doesn’t have anything significant to say about the educational, scientific, entertainment, civic, political, familial, legal, or racial issues of the day. Doing so, we seek to leave God the title of King in name only, but give His powers and authority to others, or even ourselves.

REFLECTION: What is the difference between paying homage and true worship? In what areas of your life do you treat God as a figurehead king and not your true Lord? How can we align our thoughts and actions under God?

*Lord, may I never want a kingdom without You as the King.
Grant me the wisdom and ability to seek You in everything
that I do and to live a life reflective of Your kingdom agenda.*



THE STANDARD OF TRUTH

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

We often complain about what unbelievers do. And in 2 Chronicles 15, we see that the Israelites did not seek the true God. That was their first problem, and it is our problem in our nation as well. The second problem Israel faced, which led to their decay, was a lack of teaching priests. Again, the text doesn't say there were no priests at all. But the priests had stopped teaching the truth. They had traded enlightenment for entertainment. Worship had degenerated into a social club. The church was no longer the epicenter of all life and conscience of the culture, calling people to take God seriously.

Israel was suffering from an absence of spiritual leaders who took seriously the authority of Scripture for all of life. Too often today, pastors preach to please. They fear that someone might say, "Well, I didn't like that sermon." But if the pastor preached God's Word, that's the wrong response. The issue is whether it was true, not whether it was popular. Politicians need to be popular. Preachers need to tell the truth.

The issue of truth is all-important. The lack of truth leads to a "conscienceless" society. People become anesthetized in their conscience, losing their sense of right and wrong. In such a society every person becomes a law unto himself or herself, so chaos rules.

Yet in a world where everybody's truth is true and everyone's answers are right, nobody's truth is true and no one's answers end up being right. When a society loses truth, it loses meaning, because people are never really sure about anything.

There's only one standard of truth: the changeless word of the one, true God.

REFLECTION: What alternate standards of truth vie for your attention? Why is God's Word important to the Christian life? How can we keep our hearts focused on the truth of God's Word?

All truth comes from You, Lord. Your Word is the standard by which all is to be measured. I praise You and thank You for Your Word and for the ability You have given each of us to know You and to understand Your teaching.



BAD INFORMATION

*... rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation,
devoted to prayer ... (Romans 12:12)*

When you look at the news from your community or your nation, would you describe it as chaotic or peaceful?

The third missing ingredient in Israel was God's law. When a culture has a false view of God built on bad information, God begins to remove the restraint of His law, and evil grows unbridled. What you and I are witnessing today in the rapid worsening of our culture is the reality that God is removing more and more of His restraint.

Even sinners who respect God won't do certain things. But once God is removed from or marginalized in a culture, then the standard for a society is gone and God becomes one's worst enemy and worst nightmare. That's what had happened in Israel.

When the rule of God's law is missing, chaos replaces community. You cannot have order and structure in society without God. Men become enslaved by the very freedom they seek.

We have ungodly people in our culture who don't want any divine standard to which they must be held accountable. But when God leaves a society, hope goes with Him.

As long as you have God, you have hope. He's the one thing you can count on. If God is still in the picture, and as long as His agenda is still on the table, it's not over until it's over.

Even if circumstances collapse, God will keep you. As long as God is front and center in a culture, life, family, or church, there's hope. But when He is removed, just like when people and their taxes leave the inner city and go to the suburbs, God goes to the spiritual suburbs, and the inner city's cultures crumble.

REFLECTION: How does a false view of God harm an individual? How does it harm a community or a culture? In what areas has our own culture gone astray from God's Word? How has my family followed culture instead of God's way—and how can we correct that?

*Heavenly Father, help me to always keep You front and center in my life.
And I also pray that You will help the believers in this nation to do
the same as well. Remind us of Your preeminence over all.*



GOD'S AGENDA

And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade. (Mark 4:30–32)

When you look around you, it seems like everyone has an agenda. People have plans, programs, things they want to accomplish, and specific ways they want to accomplish them. They make lists, set goals, and try to reach them. Maybe you've got your own agenda as well.

God is no stranger to agendas. In fact, He has an agenda, too; something He wants to accomplish in His way. Scripture calls this agenda God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is the alternative to the kingdom of this world. An "alternative" simply means that it is another way; there is another idea on the table. As God's people, we are not limited by the choices this world offers us. God has an alternative plan for us—called His kingdom agenda.

In the same way that our culture and our country want us to be regularly reminded about our citizenship in this kingdom called America, there is another kingdom—a greater and more perfect kingdom—of which we are a part. It is the kingdom of God.

REFLECTION: What are the three most important items on your life agenda? What do these agenda items say about your life priorities? What place do kingdom values have in your priorities?

Father, reveal to me the majesty and magnitude of Your kingdom, of which I am a part. Cause me to know both my place and position, and use me within it for the good of others and Your glory.



YOUR BIRTHPLACE

And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." (Luke 8:10)

If you are an American, you are most likely an American because you were born here. Likewise, if you are a part of the kingdom of God, it is because you have been born again into His kingdom. This foundational truth not only affects you greatly, but it is also the key to grasping the truths of the Bible.

The unifying central theme throughout the Bible is the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. The conjoining thread from Genesis to Revelation—from beginning to end—is focused on one thing: God's glory through advancing God's kingdom.

When you do not focus on that theme, the Bible presents itself as disconnected stories that may be great for inspiration but seem to be unrelated in purpose and direction. The Bible exists to share God's movement in history toward the establishment and expansion of His kingdom. It highlights the connectivity throughout, which is the kingdom. Understanding this principle increases the relevance of this several-thousand-year-old manuscript to your everyday life, because the kingdom is not only then, it is now.

REFLECTION: How does understanding the Bible's theme help us read it? If you were to summarize the Bible's theme briefly, how would you describe it? How is it comforting to know the Bible isn't really about us, but about God?

Father, open my eyes to see Your Word in light of the purposes and stories of Your kingdom. Show me the connections throughout Scripture and reveal to me the unifying heartbeat of Your own heartbeat, which is Your kingdom.



GOD'S ALL-INCLUSIVE KINGDOM

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13–14)

The kingdom of God is His rule, His plan, His program. It is all-embracing, covering everything in the universe. We can define the kingdom as *God's comprehensive rule over all creation*.

If God's kingdom is comprehensive, so is His kingdom agenda. The kingdom agenda may be defined as *the visible demonstration of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life*.

The Greek word Scripture uses for kingdom is *basileia*. This means a "rule" or "authority." It includes the concept of power. So when we talk about a kingdom, we're talking first about a king or a ruler.

Now if there is a ruler, there also have to be "rulees," or kingdom subjects (Colossians 1:13). In addition, a kingdom includes a realm—that is, a domain over which the king rules. Finally, if you're going to have a ruler, rulees, and a realm, you also need kingdom regulations: guidelines that govern the relationship between the ruler and the subjects. These are necessary so that the rulees will know whether they are doing what the ruler wants done.

God's kingdom includes all of these elements. He is the absolute Ruler of His domain, which encompasses all of creation. Likewise, His authority is total. Everything God rules, He runs.

REFLECTION: How do you react to the statement that God's rule is "comprehensive . . . over every area of life"? What areas are hard for you to submit to God's authority? How does your submission to God's authority allow you to function as you were created to function?

Father, I recognize and honor You as King and Ruler. Not only over all of Your creation, but over me. I exalt Your name as the one true King—knowing You are ultimately in charge of all things. Help me to walk according to Your rules and regulations because these will guard my life.



KINGDOM MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 17:20–21)

One of the problems facing modern Christianity today is that we have not properly defined God’s kingdom. Some people secularize and politicize the kingdom. They try to look for the solutions to life’s problems solely in our government systems or societal infrastructures. They believe that political involvement or social action will by itself usher in the kingdom.

While there is nothing wrong with entering the political arena as a believer in Jesus Christ—in fact it ought to be encouraged—we need to bear in mind that God’s kingdom is not comprised of, nor limited to, a political institution of mankind. God transcends political parties. He sides with His own agenda.

Other Christians, though, often over-spiritualize the kingdom. In contrast to their politically active brothers and sisters, these are the individuals who are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. They live with their heads and hearts in the upper levels of the ionosphere while the kingdom of God never moves beyond the esoteric belief system within them.

God’s kingdom agenda is much bigger than the political and social realm; neither is it limited to the walls of the church. It is best positioned to reach outwardly from each individual while simultaneously directing the circumference of one’s life.

REFLECTION: Where have you confused or blurred the lines between God’s kingdom and political activity? Have earthly politics become too important for you—or have you avoided your Christian citizenship responsibilities? How can you interact with political realities as a Christian?

Lord, may I not be so heavenly minded that I am no earthly good. May I likewise not seek to replace Your power, authority, and governance with solutions sought from the political or social realm that come apart from You. Rather, may my life fully reflect and radiate forth Your precepts and purposes through each and every realm.



ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. (John 10:10 THE MESSAGE)

Trusting Jesus Christ for your salvation will get you to heaven. But trusting Jesus Christ for your salvation doesn't automatically get heaven, and its subsequent power, authority, and blessings, to come down to you.

Getting into God's kingdom comes by way of the process known as conversion, but getting God's kingdom to visibly manifest itself in the daily abundant life comes through your commitment.

Getting into God's kingdom once this life concludes is a gift of salvation through faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But getting God's kingdom provisions and sanctification to you in the here and now is a special grace given in response to your dedication.

Commitment and dedication results only when the Jesus you placed your faith in is also the Jesus who rules within you—in the kingdom of which you are a part. God's kingdom goal is to manifest in history the operations of heaven. Therefore, when history does not reflect heaven—when Thy will is not done on earth as it is in heaven—then God's kingdom remains hidden in the shadows of this world. It is not visible.

His kingdom is manifestly visible to the degree that the persons of history emulate the Presence of heaven.

REFLECTION: What does it mean for God's kingdom to be visible on earth today? What would it look like for your church, your neighborhood, your workplace, and your family to see reflections of God's kingdom today? How can you bring God's kingdom values into your own life?

Father, grant me the "more and better life"—the abundant life of which Jesus Christ speaks. I realize that this comes through commitment and dedication to Him and to You, as Lord and King. You also call this abiding. Teach me to abide that I may know while yet on earth the fullness of Your heavenly grace.



THE KING'S SERVANTS

My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My Kingdom is not of this realm. (John 18:36)

Too many believers today are trying to find fulfillment and significance through human means. They are trying to discover their destinies through man's methods. However, man's methods have never accomplished God's goals. Jesus revealed that fully when He answered Pilate straightforwardly. Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My Kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36).

In essence, He said, "My method reflects My source." As believers, we are called to be in the world, but not of the world. Similarly, a boat is made to be in the water but not of the water. If the boat begins to be of the water and starts taking on water inside of it, it will soon go down.

To be in the world and yet not of the world means that worldliness does not define your decisions, relationships, priorities, or even the cadence of how you flow. The King and His kingdom controls your methodology. You seek Him first.

REFLECTION: How important is it that a Christian be in the world? How can one be *in* the world but not *of* the world? Where is your own experience on "in, but not of" out of balance?

Father, help me to let go of my own agenda and my own methods. Enable me to trust You in how things happen, and to trust that You have a way to accomplish Your will in my life. I give You thanks in advance for all You are doing in and through me.



INVISIBLE ROOTS OF THE VISIBLE

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

Everything visible and physical is controlled or derived from that which is invisible and spiritual. If you want to fix the visible and physical problems you are experiencing in your life, you have to address the spiritual and invisible issues behind them.

Why? Because if you don't address the spiritual and invisible, then you will not have addressed the divine precursor from which to solve the tangibly manifested issues at hand. What you can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell in your physical senses must first be addressed from God's realm before you can make any lasting and real difference on the earthly level.

Satan wants to get you to skip the divine perspective because he knows that you will never be able to solve your visible and physical problems until you address them from the divine realm. Heaven rules earth. What happens up there determines what goes on down here. So in order to actualize success in the challenges that you face, you need to remain in contact with heaven in order to tap into the solutions you desire for earth. In other words, abide in Christ.

REFLECTION: Do you agree or disagree that everything physical has a spiritual reality behind it? Why? How does the spiritual reality of life relate to your own life? *How* do you abide in Christ?

Lord, open my eyes to see Your vast kingdom which exists in the invisible realm. Remind me in my daily activities to keep Your presence and power in the forefront of my mind. Divert my gaze from the problems or issues that I can see to the root which lies hidden behind them so that I may overwhelmingly conquer through Christ Jesus my Lord.



KEEPING SIGHT OF WHAT MATTERS MOST

*Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)*

God's kingdom is lived from the perspective of heaven, not earth. That's why Jesus said, "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

What far too many Christians do is mix a little of God with a lot of the world. Is this something that you have done? Have you wound up experiencing less of God because His kingdom is not of this world? When you bring the world into the Word, you are asking the King to bless something that His kingdom is not a part of, and He won't do it.

If you lose sight of the kingdom, God's perspective gets lost and you start focusing on the tangible and temporal things in life. When that happens, your judgment begins to be skewed and your decisions become shortsighted. Rather than living out your destiny and purpose, you may end up with wasted time, effort, energy, and emotions.

Yet when God's kingdom is prioritized, you get to see heaven both rule and overrule in your life. You will witness God trump circumstances and people that you thought had the last word. Only God has the last word. You get to experience Him at a whole other level when you experience Him as King.

REFLECTION: How can a Christian prioritize God's Word and His kingdom? How can we experience earth from a heavenly perspective? Where are earthly circumstances overwhelming your own vision and blocking your view of God? How can you change this?

Father, I want to experience You as King in my life. Reveal to me where I am looking to the world's way rather than Your way in my thoughts, decisions, and actions. Help me to align all of these underneath Your Word so that I can benefit from the covering of Your covenant and kingdom.



ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

*The Lord has established His throne in the heavens,
and His sovereignty rules over all. (Psalm 103:19)*

As you seek to align your life underneath God's kingdom agenda, you are coming underneath His sovereign rule. Sovereignty refers to God's supremacy over all of His creation—visible and invisible. His rules are universal, absolute, and comprehensive. God is accountable to no one.

Many people don't like or understand this word—sovereignty. But it is intrinsic within God's character and makeup. In Psalm 103:19, David wrote, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all." In other words, God is not operating by anyone's permission. He sovereignly rules over each and every one of us. He sovereignly rules over you.

Look at Psalm 115:3: "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Embracing that truth is a vital part to living a successful and abundant life. Recognizing that God reigns above all can give you the confidence you need to trust Him in your day-to-day decisions. After all, He is in charge.

His claim of absolute sovereignty is the claim of Perfect Deity. God alone has the right to such a claim. Yet through His gift of His son, Jesus Christ, He has opened the door freely to you to commune with the One who sits high and lifted up over all.

REFLECTION: In what ways is it a good thing that God is sovereign? How can God's sovereignty give you confidence? Thank God that He is in control and He is good.

Sovereign Lord, You have established Your throne and Your rule. You tell the sun to rise, the rain to fall, the grass to grow, and the earth to rotate on its axis. Everything is dependent upon You. I want to honor You in my heart and in my choices in such a way that shows You I recognize Your kingdom rule over all. Enable me to do this today, and each day.



GOD'S RECIPE

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Sometimes I walk into the kitchen to see what my wife is cooking. She may be putting together a meal that does not look to me like it's going anywhere. It's a little of this and a little of that and a little of the other. I'll say, "What are you making?"

She will answer, "Wait and see."

If I have the patience to wait while she puts her special touch to the meal, when it comes to the table all I can say is, "Delicious."

That's how God works. He takes a little of this and a little of that and a little of the other that might not look too tasty on its own. Yet in His sovereignty, He can mix it, stir in a little omnipresence, add some omnipotence, a dash of grace, throw in a little goodness, mix in a little mercy, and combine it all together. Then, when it comes out of the oven, all you can say is, "Excellent."

But the only ones who can say "excellent" are those who love God and are committed to His purpose. You've got to be on His agenda, not on your own. You've got to be following His path, not your own. It's not, "Lord, this is what I want." Rather, it's "Lord, what do You want?" That is the question that defines a life lived in the abundance of the King and His kingdom.

REFLECTION: Where have you seen, in your own life, God work bad circumstances for your good or that of those you love? What examples do we have in Scripture of such instances? Why do we find it hard to trust God in hard or uncertain times? Why should we trust Him anyway?

Father, grant me the patience to wait with a trusting spirit as You arrange the situations and experiences in my life for Your good and glory. I know that You will accomplish good in and through me if I will commit my heart to love You and seek Your will. Thank you for what You are doing—even that which I cannot yet see.



EVERYTHING FOR HIS GLORY

*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)*

All things operate for the purpose of God's glory. Romans 11:36 says, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." As you may already know, *amen* means "so be it." There it is. That's it. God's glory is the bottom line in His kingdom. It is His goal.

Paul said that everything is *from* God. He is the first cause, the source. Then Paul said that *through* Him everything is. God is also the effective cause of everything in creation. And finally, Paul said that everything is *to* Him. He is the final cause. It all returns to Him to bring Him glory forever.

It is crucial that you understand that God created the universe for His pleasure and His glory (Revelation 4:11), including the creation of you (Isaiah 43:7). God did not make the world first and foremost for you but for Himself. Everything is created to bring Him glory, and that means you, too. That is your chief aim—your highest purpose. You are to reflect Him and His ways through your thoughts, choices, and actions in such a way that people look at you and can't help but give glory to God.

REFLECTION: How can the creation of mankind bring glory to God? How do His other actions do so? How can people bring God glory? How can you and your family honor and glorify God this week?

God, Your glory is intrinsic within You. Whether I give You glory or not, You are glory. I want to know the sweetness that comes from living a life that glorifies You. Make me an instrument of Your praise and let the words that come from my mouth show off the wondrous works of Your hands in my heart and life.



SATAN'S TEMPORARY KINGDOM

How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! (Isaiah 14:12)

At the beginning of known time, a rebellion took place in heaven. The “star of the morning” (Isaiah 14:12), the beautiful and powerful angel once known as Lucifer, raised his head and his hand in an attempt to take God’s throne from Him (vv. 13–14).

God had no trouble defending His throne, and Lucifer was defeated and kicked out of heaven’s kingdom. Now he is Satan, “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2)—no doubt disgruntled, vengeful, and on a mission to reclaim the power and prestige he once had. For a short time, God has permitted Satan to act as the ruler of a rival kingdom, the world of unsaved humanity and the demons of hell. At this time, Satan has his own kingdom, and we can see and feel its effect everywhere. Whenever you witness rebellion rise up against legitimate authority, you are seeing Satan at work. The thing that characterizes him and his kingdom is rebellion against divine authority. While Satan’s work might be obvious in the world around you, he will often try to subtly sway you into a spirit of rebellion against God as well. Be on the alert for his schemes which aim to remove God from His rightful place as ruler over your life.

REFLECTION: What does Satan wish to gain from getting humans to side against God? What can humans gain in such temptation? How is Satan defeated in your own life, and that of your fellow Christians?

Dear Lord, I want to be on the alert for Satan’s schemes in my life. Grant me insight and awareness to detect these schemes. Grant me also the strength and wisdom that will take me down a path to avoid falling for his tricks to mislead me. You are my rightful King. May I seek to honor You in that position with my thoughts, words, and actions each day.



GOD'S GLORY IS HIS ALONE

There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood . . . (Proverbs 6:16–17)

Satan's original name, "Lucifer," means "shining one, star." Lucifer was God's "chief angel in charge." But one day he looked into the mirror and became all too smitten with himself. He answered his own riddle, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, I'm the fairest of them all." Satan got what we would call a "God complex," making him quickly dissatisfied with his position.

Eyeing God's throne, he wondered, *Maybe there's room for two.*

Ezekiel explains God's response, "By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire" (Ezekiel 28:16).

We get a glimpse into Satan's haughtiness and boasting, which led to God's response, when we read of his five "I will" statements found in the book of Isaiah. These statements clearly outline Satan's root sin, which is pride. Scripture tells us clearly that pride is first on God's "hate list" (Proverbs 6:16–17). One reason God hates pride is that it is the fundamental attitude of the kingdom that rivals His own. The next time you feel tempted to take glory for that which should belong to God, remember what happened to Satan.

REFLECTION: What was God's response to Satan's attempt to climb up higher than a mere creature (Isaiah 14:12–17)? Why does God hate pride? Where is pride lurking in your own life? What will your response be?

Lord, pride is a sin that seeks to take glory away from You. It is a sin that You hate strongly. Sometimes it is easier to look at more obvious sins as those that offend You while ignoring this one that often remains internal in the heart. Lord, help me not to feel superior to those who are caught in obvious sins and help me to recognize the subtle sin of pride when it swells within me so that I can be convicted to humble myself before You.



OUR SPIRITUAL FOE

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

We don't have to be Christians for very long to discover that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground. This is because we are waging war in a conflict with a spiritual foe. One of Satan's strategies is to get us to forget that we are fighting a spiritual battle and to focus on the physical, tangible challenges we face instead. Unfortunately, he will often use people to do just that.

Do you ever think, "My life would be so wonderful if it weren't for people"?

Most of the problems that we face, in one way or another, can be traced back to people. It could be your mate, your family, your coworkers, or even people with whom you simply do business.

If you look a bit closer, though, behind the scenes of these conflicts and challenges in your life, you will see someone else who is lurking there with a conniving scheme to disarm and defeat you. That someone is Satan—busy pulling the strings and pushing the buttons in this invisible war raging all around us.

One of Satan's primary strategies is to use people to engineer our spiritual downfall by driving wedges between us that shatter our unity and draw our focus away from God. God is a God of unity, and He hangs out where oneness abounds.

REFLECTION: Where has a wedge been driven in unity between you and fellow Christians? Where have you erred in the other direction, ignoring truth in order to "get along" with someone? Is there anyone in your life with whom you need to be reconciled, or to whom you need to confess that you have been living under a false peace of ignoring truth?

Dear God, it is easy to become distracted by what someone else is doing or saying and think that they are the real problem when, in fact, Satan is simply using them to bring about disunity and harm. Give me a heart of kindness, compassion, and understanding—knowing that You love each of us and seek for us to live lives in unity under You.



PEOPLE ARE NOT YOUR PROBLEM

And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." (Mark 9:29)

One of the main truths you need to embrace with regard to Satan is understanding that people are not your problem. Satan is your problem. And Satan is their problem, too.

We Christians are all in the same war, and we all have the same enemy. Angels and demons are spirit beings without a physical form. Sometimes demons inhabit a form that they can use for their own ends. For example, Satan slithered in the garden as a snake. Jesus sent the legion of demons to drown in the bodies of swine.

Your problem isn't the person you think it is. Your problem is that a demon is influencing them toward disruption.

Until you realize that your struggle is not with people but with the "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"—you will never live out the victory Christ Jesus has secured for you. The next time you face a challenge or enter into a conflict with someone, go to the Lord in prayer. On your knees, fight—and win—this battle, for the victory is the Lord's. Pray for peace, protection, and wisdom for all parties involved and then watch what the Lord will do.

REFLECTION: In what relationship have you been tempted to think that the other person is your problem? What would Satan want you to do in regard to this person / issue? What does the Bible say about it? How can you pray for this person?

Dear Father, I ask You for peace, protection and wisdom in my own heart as well as in the hearts of those I am in conflict with right now, or may come into conflict with in the future. Grant us eyes to see what Satan is trying to do, and grant us the love that is necessary to treat each other with respect and honor as coheirs of the grace of God.

Show us the right way to overcoming conflict and living victoriously under You.



GRACE FREELY SUPPLIED

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. (Ephesians 6:10)

Do you ever feel weak and helpless in the struggles of life? The strength that you need to successfully do battle with the devil has already been supplied to you by God. You already have all that you need to win this war. Your strength is not accumulated nor is it earned. It is supplied by the grace of God, who equips you to live the life to which you have been called. Paul penned, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.”

Notice in the passage that Paul tells you to be *strong in the Lord*. In your humanity, you do not have the power to overcome angels—even fallen ones like the devil and his legions. God Himself is the only One capable of putting the devil in his place. He is the One who empowers you to achieve victory in your encounters with darkness, because your victory rests in Him.

Doing battle with Satan requires more than a dose of willpower. All warfare requires weaponry. Spiritual warfare requires spiritual weaponry. These weapons are given to you by God, and when you wear and apply them, you are assured the victory that God has in store for you. Your strength comes from Him. Wear it well and you will experience His victory in your life.

REFLECTION: Where do you need strength today? What have you been relying on to supply your strength? In what area do you need God’s wisdom? Pray for His strength and His wisdom, and wait on Him.

God, my strength is in You. I do not have the ability to overcome Satan or his demons or their schemes in my own strength. But You have more than enough power to do so if I will align myself under You and tap into Your strength. Give me a reminder somehow when I am starting to face my battles alone. Gently nudge me that I may remember to find my strength and victory in You and in Your might.



THINKING SPIRITUALLY

... so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 3:10)

If you don't know how to function in "heavenly places," you are going to face challenges in your earthly places. Many believers are trying to "live heavenly" without living *in* the heavenly places.

In the heavenly places, God and Satan are at war to see who will establish the rules that govern earth. The nature of Satan's kingdom makes it imperative that you learn to think spiritually. Why? Because if you are not thinking spiritually, you won't be in tune with what is happening in the heavenly realms. You won't recognize Satan's agenda when you see it, so you won't be able to wage victorious spiritual warfare.

Living and battling in the heavenly places means identifying with a spiritual worldview and participating in a divine frame of reference. You need to learn to put the spiritual ahead of the physical, because your real battle is against a kingdom that seeks to influence and dominate you spiritually. Satan knows that if he can get you hooked into his way of thinking spiritually, the physical will follow. He knows that if he can get to your mind, he can dictate the actions that follow. To wage victorious warfare in the heavenly places, you must set your mind on Christ and His truth.

REFLECTION: Based on what occupies your thoughts, what has been your first priority today? This week? Are your thoughts focused on temporary, earthly issues or on ones of eternal significance? How can you do a "priority adjustment" toward a focus on the eternally significant?

Lord, I know that my victory lies in the heavenly places. That means I need to think spiritually—from Your perspective and not my own. Give me spiritual eyes to see what You are doing and what Your strategy is for defeating the enemy's schemes in my life. Open my heart to know when Satan is seeking to defeat me, and grant me joy as I set my mind on Jesus Christ and the pureness of His love and power.