

Victory Through Intimate Love

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | April 20, 2023



It isn't awareness of, cognitive belief in, or factual knowledge of God's love, power, and goodness that heals, removes selfishness, and overcomes fear; it is the deep, abiding experience and connection with God—knowing Him, not merely knowing about Him, but knowing Him in such a way that He actually abides within our hearts via His Spirit. This experience with God is the living faith, the abiding trust, and the experiential confidence that overcomes the fear-drives of our carnal nature.

This experience in God's love cannot be obtained for us by another, any more than physical strength can be obtained for us by another. We might see a great athlete, recognize the benefit of regular exercise, and be inspired to engage in our own exercise program, but in order to gain strength, each individual must exercise for themselves.

Likewise, we might witness in others the love, joy, peace, patience, and other spiritual fruits they develop because God lives in their heart and then long for that same experience, but when it comes to growing in our spiritual strength, faith, trust, confidence, and love for and in God, it requires that we experience and know God for ourselves and then exercise our God-given abilities in harmony with Him.

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3 NIV84).

And just as in physical exercise when we start out with light weights and move on to heavier ones, so also in the things of God we start out with small duties, trials, and responsibilities, and as we, through trust in God, gain victories and grow in spiritual maturity, we move on to larger ones.

As we choose to trust God, our trust in Him strengthens and we advance from being children, babes in Christ, to mature friends of God (Hebrews 5:14; John 15:15) and are able to be His witnesses, able to be called by God to face greater obstacles and challenges and step onto larger stages with greater intensity, pressure, and ungodly assaults. We will be called to confront, via the exercise of God's weapons—love, truth, faith, mercy, forgiveness, prayer, etc.—the attacks of the enemy and overcome them, witness for God's kingdom, and, thereby, advance the gospel.

We have many examples of God's friends throughout history being called to such difficult yet rewarding places—to stand for God in the face of terrible societal and spiritual opposition.

What enabled these friends of God, who were sinners like you and me, to be able to stand for God in the face of overwhelming worldly pressure, rejection of friends, vilification by the media, police and military assault, arrest, judicial condemnation, threats of imprisonment, torture, and death? Why weren't their fears so inflamed that they caved in, gave up, ran away, and betrayed their mission? How were they able to stand firm without being consumed by fear?

They each had a personal, intimate love for and experiential knowledge of God such that His love filled their hearts, leading them to decide that they would rather die than betray the One who they know and love.

Consider these heroes of the past:

- Job—even though he lost his health, wealth, and ten children; had a wife so distraught that she called on him to curse God and die; and faced three theologian friends, who, while empathizing with his pain, told him his sufferings must be due to his own sin—had such a personal, intimate friendship with God that he knew God was not the cause. He knew that God could be trusted no matter what was happening or what others were saying. He said, even “though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15 NKJV). He did not allow the horrible losses to consume his mind or become central in his heart, but instead, he focused his heart's desire on seeking God. He would not allow others to tell him the answers but sought God for himself. It was his longstanding personal connection with God, his living faith, his abiding trust, his real and intimate love relationship with God, that allowed him to withstand the devil's vicious attacks.
- Elijah knew God so well that he was able to trust God and call out King Ahab, pronounce a three-and-a-half-year drought, and then successfully confront the 450 priests of Baal at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 17:1; 18:16–39). As long as Elijah kept his mind focused upon God and his heart centered on his love for God, he could not be shaken. But when Elijah briefly shifted his focus onto the threats from Jezebel, he became discouraged and afraid—and he ran away. God graciously met him in a lonely cave, and when Elijah recentered his heart upon God, he gained the final victory over his fear and was translated to heaven (1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2:11–13).
- Elisha was faced with the armed forces of Aram but didn't focus on the threat; instead, he focused on God and knew that he was protected by an angelic army (2 Kings 6:13–17).
- King Jehoshaphat was confronted by the armies of Ammon and Moab but did not focus upon the strength of the enemy nor his own military might; instead, he went to God, trusted in Him, and sent out singers to praise God, focusing the people upon the beauty of God's holiness—and God

delivered Judah (2 Chronicles 20).

- Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego on the plain of Dura were certainly aware of the fiery furnace, but they did not focus upon the threat; instead, they kept their love and duty to God central in their hearts and refused to bow to the idol. And God was able to use them to witness to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3).
- Daniel was cast into the lion's den but was not overcome by fear and selfishness; instead, he kept his love and trust in God central—and God sent angels to close the lion's mouths (Daniel 6:16–23).
- Jesus, during His trial and crucifixion, as our human substitute, did not focus on the betrayal, the accusations, the injustice, the mocking, the abuse; instead, when confronted by the fear, threats, pain, taunts, and torture, He focused on His Father, maintained trust in His Father, and stayed true to His mission and purpose. Jesus stayed focused on the reality of what was happening in God's universe, through the lens of eternal truth, and, thus, focused on love for God and for others. He chose to be merciful, gracious, forgiving, and He pitied those who were tormenting and crucifying Him.
- Stephen and Paul, when faced with similar injustice and abuse to that which Jesus experienced, chose to do what Jesus did; they stayed focused on God and chose to love those who were persecuting them—and they died as heroes of heaven!

Heroes of Heaven in the Last Days

The Bible describes the righteous who are alive when Jesus comes, who live through the final assault of God's enemy, who confront the beastly powers of Revelation, who face their own trials, who are falsely accused because of righteousness, and who experience injustice as those who overcome "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:11 NIV84). These victors do not focus on the injustice, the abuse, the evil around them, but on the Lamb—their Savior—and they give testimony to Jesus by acting like Jesus, by loving others more than seeking to protect self.

This is our power—the power of intimate love from and in God that enables us to break away from the fear and selfishness of this world, to reject the eye-for-an-eye mentality, to say no to the paybacks, and to:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head (Romans 12:14, 20 NIV84).

For we remember what Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:43–45 NIV84).

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:11, 12 NIV84).

Satan actively works to inflame fear, which arouses the desire to protect self, the selfish survival drives that lead people to hurt others in order to make themselves feel safe. But the secret power of God is love and truth—eternal, infinite, selfless, pure, undefiled love, which is found only in God and is revealed perfectly in Jesus Christ! We overcome by standing firmly upon the truth that has been strengthened and woven into our hearts by the eternal and unbreakable threads of God's infinite love.

And through God's truth and love, we are victors—overcomers! *And what we overcome is not others; no, we overcome the infection of sin (fear and selfishness) in our own hearts!* When confronted by evil assaults, Satan tricks people into trying to overcome sin and evil in others rather than wielding God's divine weapons to overcome sin in our own hearts. The devil dupes people into taking their focus off Jesus and refocusing upon injustices, wrongs, hurts, abuses, and unfairness that they have experienced or witnessed.

If we make evil the center of our experience, we will be overcome by evil and justify being selfish to make ourselves feel safe. Our only hope, our only path to true victory, is Jesus, to cling to Him, to run to Him, to keep Him central in our hearts and minds, to have our own intimate, personal, and experiential love for and knowledge of Him. This is our power:

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:16-21 NIV84).

Don't you see that if you are genuinely committed to God and eagerly practice his methods of love, you cannot be stopped? Even if you are attacked or persecuted for doing what is right, by forgiving and loving others you reveal God's true character and simultaneously are advancing to be more like him. So "do not fear for this mortal life as the world fears; and don't be frightened for a minute," but make Christ the center of your heart, mind and character. Always be prepared to talk about God's character of love, as revealed in Jesus, to anyone who asks why you are hopeful in the face of persecution, trial, and difficulty. But be sure to do it with gentleness, kindness and respect, with a pure heart and clear conscience, so that those who lie, gossip, and spread rumors about your ministry for Christ may be ashamed of their malicious ways. It is better, if God permits, to be persecuted for doing good than to suffer the results of doing evil, for that is exactly what Christ did (1 Peter 3:13-18 REM).

