

Helps for Spiritual Victory

Lesson Scope: Psalms 39, 42, 77, 101

Lesson Focus

God and sin are incompatible. Therefore, victory over sin is imperative for His people. Every Christian is in a life-or-death struggle for spiritual survival. Many people fail to recognize the urgency of victory over sin. Victory or the lack of it will determine where we exist in eternity.

Though there are differences in spiritual maturity among God's people, growth must be evident in the life of each person. Naturally speaking, parents expect a toddler to stumble less often as he grows older. The same must be true spiritually.

Jesus Christ is the only Person with a perfect record of victory over sin. In our battles with evil, it is comforting to know we have One on our side who is invincible and who cares enough to help us each to personal victory. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Apart from God's help, spiritual victory is impossible. Our old nature from within and this glittering world from without have too strong a pull for us to overcome by ourselves. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). The psalmists with their picturesque language describe our desperate yet hopeful situation (desperate without God but hopeful with Him). Gospel synergism includes God's merciful action and man's favorable response to bring man from a state of alienation to a close walk with Him.

Victory for the child of God does not happen without effort. Nothing less than total devotion to God and intense resolve will assure spiritual success.

Lesson Aim: To reveal resources for preserving our spiritual walk.

Theme Verses: [2 Peter 1:1-11](#). Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Lesson Text

"I Held My Peace"

[Psalm 39:1-5](#) ¹ I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. ² I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, *even* from good; and my sorrow was stirred. ³ My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: *then* spake I with my tongue, ⁴ LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it *is*; *that* I may know how frail I *am*. ⁵ Behold, thou hast made my days *as* an handbreadth; and mine age *is* as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state *is* altogether vanity. Selah.

"My Soul Thirsteth for God"

[Psalm 42:1-5](#) ¹ As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. ² My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? ³ My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where *is* thy God? ⁴ When I remember these *things*, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. ⁵ Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance.

"I Have Considered the Days of Old"

[Psalm 77:1-14](#) ¹ I cried unto God with my voice, *even* unto God with my voice; and he gave ear unto me. ² In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. ³ I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. ⁴ Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. ⁵ I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. ⁶ I call to remembrance my song in the night:

I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.⁷ Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more?⁸ Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth *his* promise fail for evermore?⁹ Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.¹⁰ And I said, This *is* my infirmity: *but I will remember* the years of the right hand of the most High.¹¹ I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.¹² I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.¹³ Thy way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary: who *is so* great a God as *our* God?¹⁴ Thou *art* the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people.

"I Will Sing ... Unto Thee, O LORD"

Psalm 101:1-4¹ I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing.² I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.³ I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; *it shall not cleave to me.*⁴ A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked *person*.

Questions for Study

"I Held My Peace"

1. Compare what it means to "take heed to my ways" versus a more casual approach to life.
2. What should the knowledge of our frailty do for us?

"My Soul Thirsteth for God"

3. How can we find spiritual refreshment in God?
4. What is the difference between mere positive thinking and finding our hope in God?

"I Have Considered the Days of Old"

5. What words in these verses describe the intensity of the writer's search for God? Apply them to our experience today.
6. How does reflecting on God's goodness in the past encourage the saint?
7. Enlarge on the greatness of God.

"I Will Sing ... Unto Thee, O LORD"

8. What steps must every saint take to preserve his spiritual life?

Analyzing the Passage

The writing of Psalm 39 is attributed to David. It was delivered to Jeduthun, one of three musicians appointed by David. Heman and Asaph were the other two (1 Chronicles 25:1-6). Their descendants were still leading in worship in Nehemiah's time.

Notice David's colorful descriptions of his inner turmoil—"my heart was hot," and "the fire burned" within (Psalm 39:3). Yet he kept his mouth "with a bridle." "I was dumb"; "I held my peace" (Psalm 39:1-2). In his distress, David was concerned that he would not spoil his testimony to the wicked by sinning with his mouth.

David likely authored Psalm 42 as well. Its mood seems to fit his experiences as he fled from Saul early in life and later from his son Absalom. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks," so David longed to "appear before God" and go "with the multitude ... to the house of God" (Psalm 42:1-4).

Asaph, in Psalm 77, is desperate for a vital relationship with God. "I cried" and "I sought the Lord ... and ceased not" reveal his sense of urgency in this matter.

In Psalm 101:2, David's use of the word perfect twice emphasizes his unreserved, unwavering commitment to God. Obviously, David was in a wholehearted quest to know God.

Principles and Applications

"I Held My Peace"

1. Carefully considering our ways helps us to relate properly to life's trials (39:1-3). Carefulness must be the watchword of every saint. Casual, mediocre, lukewarm spirituality is not spirituality at all. We must learn to accept our weaknesses and steer clear of any place or circumstance that might ensnare us. "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15).

2. A wholesome view of the frailty of human life leads us to seek the Lord's blessing (Psalm 39:4-5). Seventy or eighty years is such a minute part of eternity, yet it is during these years—however many the Lord gives us—that we determine where we will be in eternity. The frailty of this life and the length of the next motivate us to carefully consider our ways.

"My Soul Thirsteth for God"

3. Finding personal refreshment in the Lord is essential to a victorious walk (Psalm 42:1-2). A consistent, meaningful, purposeful devotional life cannot be overemphasized in producing and maintaining spiritual vitality. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Every Christian must have a plan for daily Bible reading and prayer.

4. Collective worship fills a vital role in spiritual victory (Psalm 42:4). Without question, we find spiritual encouragement and inspiration in associating with other believers. We are social beings who need the perspective and help of others to be balanced in all areas of life. By ourselves, we are unbalanced in one way or another.

5. Keeping a solid confidence in God even in distressing circumstances is essential for victory (Psalm 42:5). In times of severe trial, people are sometimes tempted to throw up their hands in despair and turn from God. But what will they turn to? In our darkest moments, as well as in all other times, God is the one we need most. He alone can and will meet our needs if we trust Him.

"I Have Considered the Days of Old"

6. Earnestly crying out to God in our distress is essential for victory (Psalm 77:1-4). The storm on Galilee drove the disciples to Jesus in desperation (Mark 4:37-41). So the storms in life today help to bring us to the end of ourselves. Calling upon God is our only hope. "I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4).

7. Reviewing God's past faithfulness encourages us in the present trials (77:5-12). In present trials when God seems to withdraw from us, we must deliberately choose to consider Him and His past goodness. There is plenty of evidence if we will just look for it. Nevertheless, it is an act of faith to stop looking down and to begin looking up in the midst of all our difficulties.

8. Meditating on God's greatness helps us to be strong (Psalm 77:13-14). The Creator of the universe, whom the "heaven of heavens cannot contain," has an abiding interest in knowing and in helping each of us. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Christ's greatness and humility are evident. He forces Himself on no one; He knocks before entering (Revelation 3:20). But He will come in and commune with all who receive Him.

"I Will Sing ... Unto Thee, O LORD"

9. God's mercy makes a spiritual walk possible (Psalm 101:1). In our difficult moments in life, it is good to remember that God owes us nothing. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). In mercy, God has provided a way back to Himself so that we can again walk with Him.

10. Maintaining an open conscience preserves a spiritual walk (Psalm 101:2). The Spirit of God is too often grieved and quenched by callous, fallen humanity. Worldly influence inclines our consciences toward insensitivity. It is our duty to keep our conscience sensitive and open to the Spirit of God. He yet speaks with "a still small voice." If we are careless, we will not hear Him, and we will lose our way.

11. Taking deliberate steps to avoid tempting influences and associations is essential to a spiritual walk (Psalm 101:3-4). We must do whatever it takes to live in victory over sin. It is a life-or-death matter. Jesus taught that losing an eye or hand is preferable to spending eternity in hell (Matthew 5:29-30). Friendships must be guarded. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). It is those who are careful, not casual, who will survive and thrive in the midst of their battles with sin and unbelief.

Important Teachings

1. Carefully considering our ways helps us to relate properly to life's trials (Psalm 39:1-3).

2. A wholesome view of the frailty of human life leads us to seek the Lord's blessing (Psalm 39:4-5).

3. Finding personal refreshment in the Lord is essential to a victorious walk (Psalm 42:1-2).

4. Collective worship fills a vital role in spiritual victory (Psalm 42:4).

5. Keeping a solid confidence in God even in distressing circumstances is essential for victory Psalm (42:5).

6. Earnestly crying out to God in our distress is essential for victory (Psalm 77:1-4).

7. Reviewing God's past faithfulness encourages us in the present trials (Psalm 77:5-12).

8. Meditating on God's greatness helps us to be strong (Psalm 77:13-14).

9. God's mercy makes a spiritual walk possible (Psalm 101:1).
10. Maintaining an open conscience preserves a spiritual walk (Psalm 101:2).
11. Taking deliberate steps to avoid tempting influences and associations is essential to a spiritual walk (Psalm 101:3-4).

Answers to Questions

1. Compare what it means to "take heed to my ways" versus a more casual approach to life.

Taking heed to our ways means being vigilant, awake, and alert to the enemy without and within. We have one life to live, and the judgment follows (Hebrews 9:27). Our destiny will be heaven or hell. Casual Christianity is a misnomer; it does not exist. All who reach heaven were careful how they thought, spoke, and lived. Casual people are living in a dream world; Christians sense the dangers around them and are the true realists as they act upon those dangers.

2. What should the knowledge of our frailty do for us?

Our frailty should help us sense our need to be prepared to meet God at any moment. Life is uncertain. We never know when we will breathe our last breath. This knowledge should also drive us to warn others who are not taking life as seriously as they should.

3. How can we find spiritual refreshment in God?

We find spiritual refreshment in God in much the same way we find physical refreshment—a good diet, proper exercise, and adequate rest. Our diet must include feeding on God's Word—daily Bible reading. Do you have a plan to get through the entire Bible regularly? Do whatever it takes to keep devotional times meaningful. Keeping a devotional journal forces you to search for some inspirational tidbit that will feed your soul. We cannot afford to be slipshod or aimless in feeding our souls. Of course, putting what we read into practice is the ultimate test of being truly inspired. This is the exercise. Rest is found in knowing that all is well with our souls—trusting in the promises of the Word.

4. What is the difference between mere positive thinking and finding our hope in God?

Mere positive thinking has no spiritual basis. It is like a fearful boy whistling in the dark. Hope in God is based on the promises of God in His Word. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they

comfort me."

5. What words in these verses describe the intensity of the writer's search for God? Apply them to our experience today.

"I cried"; "I sought"; "My sore ran ... and ceased not"; "I ... was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed."

We dare be no less intense in our search for God than Asaph was. After all, our lives for eternity depend upon a relationship with God that must begin now in time. At times we too feel overwhelmed with a sense of our weakness and need of outside help. In these times we must by faith reach out to "the God that doest wonders" (Psalm 77:14).

6. How does reflecting on God's goodness in the past encourage the saint?

In the darkness of our difficulties, we tend to forget the good things God has done for us. In those times we must deliberately step back and honestly consider those things.

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

7. Enlarge on the greatness of God.

A look into the starry heavens on a clear night is enough to bring awe to any intelligent being. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (1 Kings 8:27). This God who created it all is the same one who speaks in Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." In our darkest days, it is comforting to remember that Someone cares who is infinitely greater than all of our troubles combined.

8. What steps must every saint take to preserve his spiritual life?

David knew what it was like to walk in his house with an imperfect heart (2 Samuel 11:1, 2). He knew the power of sight. He would be more careful now (Psalm 101:2-3) with what he looked at.

Behind the scenes of a godly life are lines that have been drawn as far from evil as possible, not as near as possible without falling into sin. Daniel made the decision to separate from the lavishness of the king's table. It is much easier to say no before you have savored something than after you have savored it.

Summarizing the Lesson

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

—William Cowper

Research Guide

Read the six short articles in the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Testimony entitled "Helps for Christian Victory." The following is a list of the subtitles dated from January to June of 1990: (1) "Dying to Self," (2) "Resisting Temptation," (3) "Dealing With Doubt," (4) "Checking Fleshly Impulses," (5) "Appreciating Brotherhood Safeguards," and (6) "Living by Faith."