

SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN LIVING

book eight in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

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- Day One: Seek to Please God
 - Day Two: Love God and Love Others
 - Day Three: Let the Holy Spirit Change You
 - Day Four: Stop, Think, Pray
 - Day Five: Review and Test

Successful Christian Living: Book eight in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

By Doug Britton, MFT

Twelve books on “Knowing God”

Twelve books on “Developing a Godly Character”

Twelve books on “Enjoying Healthy Relationships”

Twelve books on “Overcoming Personal Problems”

For

Individuals

Small Groups

Churches

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

Knowing God

- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

Enjoying Healthy Relationships

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: Seek to Please God

What does it mean to be successful? For many of us, it might be having a nice home, making a lot of money, getting straight A's, or being popular. Or we might think success means having a wonderful marriage, great children, and close friends.

Others might measure success by how well they do in sports, on the job, games on their smartphone, gardening, or fantasy football. Or they may think they are successful if they have power over others, if they are admired, or if people are afraid of them.



Make it your goal to please God

There's nothing wrong with some of the above goals, such as having a nice home or a wonderful marriage. But they should not be our primary goals.

The Bible shows us a different way to look at goal-setting and measure success. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, our main goal should be to please God.

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10)

Paul made a similar point in his letter to the Philippians.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Discussion questions

1. According to Paul, what should be our goal?
2. How does this goal compare to the goals people usually have?
3. If someone's main goal is to please God, is it okay to also have other goals such as wanting friends, building a wonderful marriage, or having a nice home? Why or why not?

Don't be controlled by other people's ideas or opinions

It's easy to focus on pleasing other people, not God. That's because most of us are tremendously influenced by other people's opinions.

If someone you admire (or fear) says something is good—or that something is bad—you may automatically agree. Likewise, if everyone in your peer group agrees about something, you will probably feel a lot of pressure to go along with them.

It's normal to go along with others, yet God wants us to break away from being controlled by people's opinions and peer pressure.

I love Paul's example. He was concerned about what God thought, and he cared little about what people thought. Let's look at what he wrote in some of his letters:

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. (1 Thessalonians 2:6)

Discussion questions

4. Why is it hard to care more about pleasing God than pleasing others?
5. How can we change our way of thinking so we will focus on winning God's approval, not other people's approval?
6. Are there times when it's okay to try to win others' approval? Why or why not?

Don't be devastated by criticism

It can be hard not to be negatively influenced by others' opinions when they criticize or attack you. The following points can help you hear critical words without being devastated:

Learn, but don't be crushed.

You already know you aren't perfect. No one is. Try to learn something helpful when others criticize you—even if you don't agree with everything they say.

Don't take things personally.

If someone says critical or harsh words, ask yourself:

- Are these words Christ-like?
- Are these words loving?
- Are these words wise?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is "no," don't take critical or harsh words personally. Instead, see that person as having a problem and pray for him or her. As Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Try to live at peace with everyone

Although pleasing God should be your first priority, don't use that as an excuse to be unpleasant to other people. As Paul wrote, live at peace with others whenever possible.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:18)

Discussion questions

7. How can we balance trying to please God while also trying to live at peace with everyone?
8. How can remembering your main goal of pleasing God help you when you are criticized?
9. What are some other ways you can learn from criticism without being crushed?

Examine yourself

What are your goals in life? Whatever they are, you may think that when you achieve them you will be content or happy. However, if you achieve them there's a good chance they will not bring lasting contentment or happiness.

Discussion questions

10. What have been your major goals in life?
11. In view of today's lesson, what will be your main goal in life?

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

Want to learn more?**Free online Bible study**

How to Be Born Again

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Books by Doug Britton

Getting Started, Getting Connected

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/getting-started

First Things First

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/first-things-first

Notes

Day Two: Love God and Love Others

In Day One, you read that the key to living a successful Christian life is to please God. But what does that mean? How can we please God?

You could try to answer this question by going through the Bible and making a list of everything it says to do and not to do. Then you could try to do everything on the list. However, you would soon be overwhelmed. Your list would have thousands of instructions or commands.

In today's lesson, you will read a much easier way to please God—to love him and to love others.



Jesus told us how to please God

Jesus showed us how to please God when he answered the question, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” (Matthew 22:36).

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
(Matthew 22:37-40)

These two commandments—to love God and to love others—show us what is most important to God. Plus, they help us understand what’s under all the other commands and instructions in the Bible. These additional instructions help us know how to love God and to love others. Without them, we would not know how to love in many situations.

For example, if there were only the two great commandments and nothing else, you might think, “I love someone, so I will have sex with him or her.” However, if you read the many instructions in the Bible about sexual immorality, you will think something very different— “I won’t have sex with him or her because I want the best for that person.”

Discussion questions

1. What are the two greatest commandments?
2. Jesus said, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:40). What do you think Jesus meant by that?
3. Read Luke 10:29-37. According to this passage, who is your neighbor?

The first commandment

The first commandment—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37)—says a lot. It means much more than going to church every week. And it means much more than being “religious.”

As you continue reading, you will read steps to help you grow in your love for God. As you read, remember this is not a checklist of things to do. Instead, it is a list of ideas to help you grow in love with God.

Enjoy God's love.

The more you understand God's love for you, the more you will love God. Walking with him is much more than following a set of rules. It is basking in his love and enjoying an intimate relationship with him.

Make this prayer your personal prayer:

Read the following prayer taken from Ephesians 3:16-19. (I've changed a few words to make it a more personal prayer.)

I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that I may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Some steps to loving God:

- Read the Bible daily.
- Praise and worship God throughout the day.
- Thank God for your salvation and the many ways he has blessed you.
- Ask for and receive forgiveness for your failures and sins.
- Pray to grow closer to God. Pray for:
 - A stronger desire to read the Bible.
 - Greater understanding of the Bible.
 - A deeper trust in God.
 - Contentment with what God has provided.
 - Freedom from fear.
- When making choices, ask yourself, "Would this please God?"

Discussion question

4. Which of the previous ideas will help you love God more? Why will this help?

The second commandment

Now let's look at the second commandment—to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). When Jesus used the word "neighbor," he didn't just mean someone who lives next door. He meant anyone with whom you have contact. He even meant your enemies (Matthew 5:44).

When Jesus said to love your neighbor "as yourself," he was saying to love other people intensely.

What is love?

Learning how to love others is a life-long process for Christians. A good place to start is 1 Corinthians 13. In this chapter, Paul teaches us that love is not sweet, emotional feelings for others (although those are wonderful). Instead, love is found in our attitudes and actions. In essence, love is a choice.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

Some steps to loving others:

- Remind yourself that Christ died for them.
- Pray for them.
- Spend time with them.
- Serve them.
- Encourage them.
- Tell them about Jesus.

Discussion questions

5. Which of these steps will help you love others more?
6. What makes it difficult for you to love others? How can you overcome this?

Ask God to help you fulfill these two commandments every day

Living by the two greatest commandments does not come naturally for most of us. We often forget them. Or we give in to our stubbornness, selfishness, or irritation.

Since we know we can't successfully follow the two main commandments on our own, it's a good idea to ask God every morning (and throughout the day) to help us love him and others more.

Discussion questions

7. When is a good time for you to pray to love God and others more?
8. How can you remind yourself to pray at this time?
9. What are potential obstacles that might prevent you from praying at this time? How can you overcome these obstacles?

Memory verse

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

Want to learn more?

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More studies on growing closer to Jesus

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/jesus

5. Ask yourself: How well do I love other people?
Do I feel anger or hatred for certain people? Yes No
When I am with others, do I think about how I can bless them? Yes No
Do other people experience my love when I am with them? Yes No
Do I reject certain types of people? Yes No
Do I complain about other people? Yes No
Do I criticize or ridicule anyone when talking about him or her? Yes No
Do I pray for my enemies and those who mistreat me? Yes No
When discussing problems with others, do I speak respectfully? Yes No
Do I forgive others? Yes No

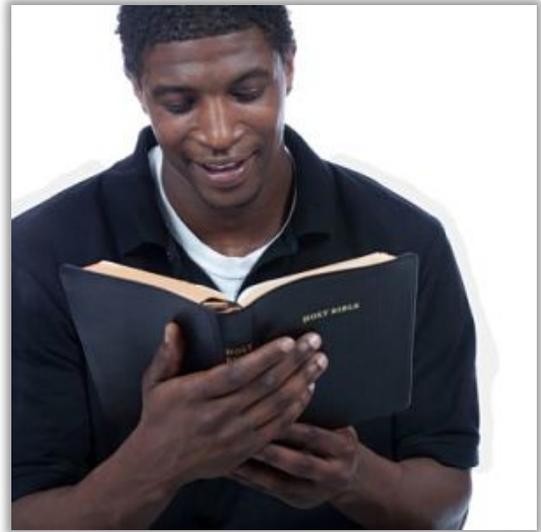
6. Think of one person you have not loved and say a silent prayer for him or her.
After you pray, check here:

7. Does the fact that God loves you help you love him? Why or why not?

Day Three: Let the Holy Spirit Change You

When we are born again, there are things to learn, and things to unlearn. Habits to form and habits to break. We are like babies in many ways. We crawl and we stumble as we learn how to walk. We fall, then we struggle to our feet and keep going.

We quickly learn that we can't change on our own and that we need God's help. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in.



The Holy Spirit

In *Who is God*, the first book in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” you read that there is one God, not many gods (Mark 12:29). You also read that the Bible refers to God as:

- Father (Galatians 1:1)
- Jesus (John 20:28) or the Son
- Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4)

The following passage refers to all three in the same sentence (the underlining is mine).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

The Bible says God is one, yet it also refers to him as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's why many people use the term “Trinity” to describe God. He is one being of three co-equal persons or aspects. He is unique, with individuality and personality that is manifested in three persons.

When you became a believer, the Holy Spirit entered into you. When you think about it, that's an amazing thing. God loves you and his Spirit lives within you. He is there to guide you, watch over you, transform you, correct you, and encourage you.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

God's goal is to transform you—to help you become more like Christ

Being a follower of Jesus means much more than going to church or trying to live a good life. It means letting the Holy Spirit change you. Here's one verse in which Paul wrote about God transforming us:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Here are three more verses that illustrate God's desire for you to be transformed and renewed:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:9-10)

Discussion question

1. What is the difference between acting religious and being transformed?

Produce fruit

As God transforms you, he wants to help you change your attitudes and emotions, to help you grow what the Bible calls the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). Let's read about this fruit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

God causes the fruit to grow.

God is interested in the type of person you become. He wants you to become fruitful.

How do we grow fruit? It's actually God's Holy Spirit—not us—who produces the fruit. The fruit grows as a result of the Spirit working within us.

We have a role to play.

Although God produces the fruit, there are things we can do to help our fruit grow. For example:

- We can loosen or break up the soil of our hearts, allowing God's roots to go deep. We can surrender to God's will for our lives.
- We can water the tree by reading the Bible, God's word.
- We can fertilize the ground by spending quality time with other believers and listening to sound teaching.
- We can kill pests or bugs that would damage the fruit by fighting sin and resisting the devil.

- We can allow God to prune our diseased hearts, ideas, attitudes, or behaviors that prevent healthy fruit from growing.
- We can ask God to fill us with his Spirit. When we become believers, the Holy Spirit enters us. As we go through life, we can pray to grow closer to him—to be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

Discussion questions

2. What are things you can do to help healthy fruit grow in yourself?
3. What are the main things in your life that might prevent fruit from growing in you? What can you do to change this?

Remember to focus on changing on the inside

The Bible tells us in many places how to live—how to overcome sin, how to have good relationships, how to help others, and how to tell others about Jesus. These are all important goals, but if we aren't changing on the inside as well as on the outside, we are missing out on what really matters to God.

God wants to transform us on the inside, to help us become more like Jesus in our attitudes, our beliefs, and our love for others.

The religious leaders Jesus talked to didn't understand this. They thought pleasing God meant acting right. Look at what Jesus said to them:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (Matthew 23:25-28)

If we are honest with ourselves, most of us sometimes slip into the same behavior as the Pharisees. It's easy to put on a good show, acting the way we think Christians should act, without dealing with the messiness inside our heart.

Discussion questions

4. Do you sometimes find yourself focusing more on acting right instead of cleaning up inside? If so, describe a time when you did this.
5. Why do you think many of us focus more on our outward appearance and actions than on what's going on inside of us?
6. Read Matthew 12:34. What does “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” mean?
7. Today's lesson focuses on changing on the inside. Does this mean we don't need to worry about exercising self-control in our words and actions?

How willing are you to let God transform you?

How willing are you to cultivate your soil and let God produce fruit within you? If you are like most people, your old nature sometimes resists God's Spirit. There may be some fruit you don't want to grow—even if God says it is healthy.

For example, he may want to help you grow in patience, but you may be determined to be impatient. Or he may want to help you grow in kindness, and you may be determined not to be kind to someone—even though you know God's ways are infinitely better than yours, and you know you are hurting yourself when you resist him.

Another way God wants to help us change is in our attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values. Most of us come from a background or culture in which we have learned things that contradict what God says. As you open yourself up to God, he will lead you into truth.

If you find yourself wanting to be open to the Holy Spirit, but at the same time you are resisting him, ask him to help you change your attitude and cultivate your soil. Ask him for a clean heart. Follow David's example by praying:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

Discussion questions

8. God wants to produce fruit in you—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. How willing are you to cultivate your soil and let the Holy Spirit produce this fruit?
9. Pray for openness to cultivating your soil. Also pray for God to produce a large harvest of fruit in you.

Memory verse

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Want to learn more?

Book by Doug Britton

Who Do You Think You Are?

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/who-are-you

Day Four: Stop, Think, and Pray

In this book, you have read about pleasing God, loving God and others, and letting the Holy Spirit change you.

Unfortunately, no matter how close you are to God, there will be times when you are tempted to sin. Or there will be times when you find yourself dealing with anger, jealousy, envy, or another negative emotion.

Don't think there's something wrong with you when this happens. Everyone—including the early Christians—has had to deal with what the Bible calls “the flesh.” For example, Peter and Barnabas—two key leaders in the early church—gave in to the fear of peer pressure.

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. (Galatians 2:11-13)



Discussion question

1. If someone is trying to please God, is it possible he or she will experience negative emotions or be tempted to do something wrong? Explain your answer.

Learn how to deal with negative emotions

You are about to read practical steps you can take when you feel “dangerous” emotions such as temptation, anger, or resentment build up within you. I call them “dangerous” because these emotions often spur us to sin. For example, if someone insults you, you may instantly insult him or her back.

That's not how God wants us to live. He wants us to learn how to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not our emotions.

Discussion questions

2. What are some negative emotions you have given in to? How did you act when you gave in to them?
3. How serious are you about wanting to overcome emotions that could prompt you to sin? Explain your answer.

STP: Stop, think, and pray

In today's lesson you will learn a habit that can help you change the way you react to dangerous emotions. In other words, you will see how to be controlled by the Holy Spirit instead of your emotions.

What is this new habit? I call it STP (Stop, think, and pray). Whenever you face a challenging situation, "stop, think, and pray."

As you read about STP, you will see that it could just as easily be called SPT (Stop, pray, and think). Actually, you are likely to do all three things at the same time.

1. Stop (Catch sin early)

Learn to stay alert. Ask God to help you be increasingly aware of what the Holy Spirit and your conscience are saying. The earlier you catch yourself starting to slip into sin, the easier it is to stop.

Identify sin as sin.

A key to catching yourself at early stages is to identify sin as sin. Do not sugarcoat it or ignore warning signs. Train yourself to "distinguish between good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

Learn to recognize decision points.

Temptation rarely arrives in full force without a warning. You can usually identify decision points leading up to the sin.

Choose to exercise self-control.

Self-control is a central part of the Christian life.

So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8)

Choose not to sin. Say something to yourself such as:

I choose, with God's help, not to sin.

I don't have to do this, and I will not do it.

I choose to obey God, not the devil.

I won't sin. I choose righteousness.

Discussion questions

4. How can you discipline yourself to stop when a strong emotion comes over you?
5. Which of the previous points will help you stop? Explain your answer.

2. Think

Now that you have stopped, let's move on to the second step—to think things through. In this section you will read several ideas that can help you think. Look for ones that will work for you.

When tempted, thank God for the opportunity to grow (James 1:2-4).

Remind yourself that sin is your enemy, not your friend.

Remember that God is right there with you.

Think about the consequences of sin or bad choices (Galatians 6:7-8).

- Sin grieves God (Ephesians 4:30-31).
- Sin harms your walk with God (1 Timothy 1:5-6).
- Sin gives Satan an opening (Ephesians 4:26-27).
- God punishes sin (Proverbs 6:27-29).
- Sin harms others.
- God punishes those who lead others into sin (Matthew 18:6).
- Sin harms your witness for Christ.
- Sin harms your potential.
- Sin results in natural consequences.
- Sin results in guilt and misery.

Think about the consequences of making good choices and obeying God.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)*

- You please God.
- You grow in the Spirit.
- You build resistance to future sin.
- You are a good example to others.
- You experience joy.
- You avoid the negative consequences of sin.

Make an action plan.

- Be ready to flee.
- Be ready to deal with the situation in a mature way.

Discussion questions

6. Which of these points will help you think things through? Describe a situation you might face and how you will put these points into practice.
7. What is one situation in which you might have trouble following these steps? How can you overcome your emotional responses?

3. Pray

Pray, the last part of STP, is the key to success in our struggle to defeat temptation. We need God's help.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Here are some prayers you could pray when you are tempted:

Help me, God, to be faithful to you and to your commandments.

God, help me be clear-headed about what is going on.

Thank you God that I don't need to sin.

God, help me look at women (or men) as my sisters (or brothers)—or as people who need Christ—not as sex objects.

Help me Lord to remember the blessings of obedience.

Lord, show me the path to take.

Thank you God for this opportunity to grow closer to you.

Lord, help me be content.

Please help me walk with honesty and not “cut corners.”

God, please help me not to give in to self-pity.

Help!

In addition to these prayers, you could rebuke the devil (you will read more about spiritual warfare in a later book in this series) by saying something such as:

I resist (or “reject” or “rebuke”) that thought, in Jesus' name.

The Lord rebuke you, Satan.

Discussion question

8. Which of the previous prayers will help you when you are tempted? Why will they be helpful?

Memory verse

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Want to learn more?

Book by Doug Britton

Defeating Temptation

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/temptation

Homework – Day Four

1. Write a brief summary of what STP (Stop, think, and pray) means:
2. Do you think it is possible to stop instead of giving in to temptation or other emotions? Why or why not?
3. What insight in this lesson will help you stop instead of giving in to temptation or other emotions?
4. How can thinking about the consequences of sinning help you?

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- F 1. Pleasing God is a nice idea, but it's not possible.
- F 2. The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love yourself.
- T 3. When possible, we should please God and live at peace with others.
- F 4. When Jesus said "neighbor," he was referring to your immediate neighborhood.
- T 5. God produces the fruit of the Spirit, but you can cultivate the soil.
- F 6. The two greatest commandments are all we need to read in the Bible.
- T 7. It's possible to love others even though you don't feel any emotions.
- F 8. If you feel tempted to do something wrong, you are not a Christian.
- T 9. STP stands for "Stop, think, and pray."
- F 10. STP stands for "Stand, think, and pray."

Memory verses

- 1. 1 Thessalonians 2:4
We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

- 2. Romans 6:23
For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

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Read and download Doug's free online studies on marriage, parenting, anger, self-concept, anxiety, depression, temptation, fear of death, biblical counseling, mentoring, small group leadership, and other topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources.

Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

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Defeating Temptation
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Talking with Respect and Love
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