

# *The Life of Victory*

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## **You might be saved, but losing the spiritual war in your life...**

What does a victorious life mean to you?

Can you name all three of your spiritual enemies and how they work against you?

Do you own things or do things own you? How would you feel if you lost everything?

Are there sins in your life you seem to have no power to overcome?

Are you full of peace, joy, happiness and love all the time?

## **The ultimate victory**

“Victory” is a simple concept. It’s about conquest and triumph in a conflict. The conflict might come from an enemy or antagonist, a personal struggle or trying to master a talent. Victory brings an adrenaline rush and feeling of elation that transcends everything else going on in the world. “The thrill of victory...and the agony of defeat...” was an iconic phrase from the TV show *Wide World of Sports* in the 1960s and 1970s. The phrase later transcended the original context and was used to describe the emotional extremes of triumph and failure in other aspects of life.

Being victorious at something, anything or everything has become important in our society. Everyone wants to be a winner. Countless books have been written on how to achieve victory. Whether it is seeking victory in sports, work or life itself, there is a book offering formulas and specific steps which will guarantee victory.

If victory is ever in doubt, one can search for quotes about victory on the internet and choose from over a thousand quotes available, many from famous people who have themselves been victorious at something. Repeating quotes and mantras or looking at posters hanging from the wall can be very motivational to “keep your eyes on the prize”.

But the greatest victory in the history of mankind came without pomp and circumstance. It came without celebrations and fist pumping. It came without a victory lap or trophy. In fact, to the world at the time it appeared to be utter defeat. Jesus’ victory over sin and death was the greatest victory the world has ever known. Through Jesus, we too can be victorious over all three of our spiritual enemies.

## **Victory over the world**

“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36)

Jesus was thirty-three years old. He wasn’t running a corporation. He wasn’t rich. He wasn’t a world-renown gladiator or war hero. In only a few short hours, His Passion and Death would be relentlessly thrust upon Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was at that moment Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage, I have conquered the world” (John 16:33). What might the poor castaways of the world sitting at table with Him for His Last Supper been thinking after these words? How could anyone in such a meager state and about to be murdered claim to have already conquered the world?

Victory in life is supposed to mean wringing out of a reluctant world every benefit possible. Victory is achieved when the world yields unto man the things he craves most. How much is in the bank, how many fine things are owned, whose name is at the top, who is the boss, who is the best...these are the measures given by the world for success and victory. But whatever man can achieve and claim, he isn’t the real winner. The world wins when it succeeds in obscuring or separating man from the only thing he has to live for, God the Father.

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In the process of getting, what does man lose? He sets his sights on a thing, spends hours daydreaming about it and even more hours working to obtain it. The thing consumes him and becomes his master. Once it is obtained, it absorbs him and his thoughts. He must secure it and keep it safe. How desperate and wretched he becomes if in a moment of time his prize is taken away.

At the Last Supper, Jesus' words shattered the illusions of victory and defeat, fortune and fame, success and failure. Man is victorious over the world only when he wrestles with it and overcomes the notion he must have it. He wins when he makes the world an instrument of getting nearer to the Father, when he can dwell on the Father instead of daydream about the world, when he desires only God's treasure and when he seeks to do the Father's will instead of the world's will. This was the victory Jesus had over the world. This is the victory over the world Jesus freely gives to all His disciple, if they would but accept it and desire it.

## **Victory over the flesh**

"For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want." (Galatians 5:17)

God created mankind in His image, except for a not-so-minor detail. Mankind was created as spirit and flesh, not just spirit. As flesh, man has what is called basic human needs. Food, water and sleep are necessary to survive. God's love is good, but human friendship and love are also necessary. Feelings of hunger, thirst and tiredness drive man to pursue basic needs. Feelings of affection and companionship unite man to his wife. After Creation, everything was all good and working well; until that fateful day in the Garden when the apple incident occurred.

The flesh used to be satisfied with "daily bread". But on that catastrophic day, when mankind gave its will to the devil, feelings became disordered. Basic needs for survival and companionship were turned into objects of enjoyment and self-satisfaction. Hunger and thirst became gluttony. Sleep became sloth. Love became lust. Self-preservation became pride, envy and wrath. The flesh began to work against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. This war continues to rage on daily in the heart of every human being. The flesh wins when it succeeds in leading man to serve his own desires and pleasures instead of following the commandments of his Creator, God the Father.

The flesh can never be completely or permanently satisfied. The flesh lives only in the moment. The brownie eaten five minutes ago for dessert was delicious and the flesh wants to experience the deliciousness again, so have another and another and another. One of my downfalls to this day is ice-cream. I find it too difficult to walk into an ice-cream shop and order only one scoop. I can narrow my choices down to three, then can't decide. The easiest solution is to get a scoop of each, even though I know it ruins the diet for the day. The flesh is even willing to attack itself.

But this isn't about calling brownies or ice-cream a sin. These aren't the concern. The concern is the flesh's unwillingness to comply with what the spirit knows is right. The concern is being unable to say "no" to the flesh in small things and then convincing oneself "this isn't a big deal". In the end, the biggest concern is giving one's free will over to the flesh, so the flesh has free reign to control the spirit instead of using free will and the Spirit to overcome the flesh. Without self-control of the flesh, bigger problems and sin can rear their ugly head; such as immorality, impurity, hatred, jealousy, drunkenness, rebellion, etc. See Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 1:29-31 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 for the dirty laundry list of fleshly sins.

Man is victorious over the flesh only when he denies the flesh power to control his will. He must submit to the spirit rather than the flesh and cast aside any notion that things of the flesh are more satisfying than things of the

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spirit. He wins when desires of the flesh are rightly ordered once again...when daily bread is enough...when marriage is sacred...and when perpetual joy and satisfaction come only from being loved by the One Triune God.

## **Victory over evil**

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

Being in the flesh and having human needs wasn’t the original problem. Mankind could have lived in the flesh joyfully with God for eternity. The problem started with that eternal instigator known as the devil. Over the years, I’ve heard a number of false notions about the devil. Knowing the enemy is important for achieving victory in any battle. Here are some facts about our adversary:

- He is not just as powerful as God. He is only a fallen angel created by God.
- He has no power over us. The devil did not make you do it.
- His greatest powers are lying and deception to those of weak faith and understanding.
- He sends false apostles who use Christ’s name in order to deceive (2 Corinthians 11:13).
- He can disguise himself as an angel in order to deceive (2 Corinthians 11:14).

This means there are some keys to victory over our adversary:

- Call upon the Lord for protection and deliverance (2 Thessalonians 3:3).
- Resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:7), similar to Jesus’ temptation in the desert.
- Study Scripture and seek knowledge to overcome lies and deception (2 Corinthians 11:3).
- Follow only teachings, doctrine, prophecy and visions approved by the Church; because Jesus promised His Church would always prevail (Matthew 16:18).
- Pray and seek discernment from the Holy Spirit before believing anything (1 John 4:1).

## **Insights for a victorious life**

The victory is already won. Victory is not a future hope, but a present reality. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). Jesus already won the victory over our spiritual enemies through His death and resurrection. Our victory comes through Jesus and is empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The signs of a victorious life are freedom from the bondage of habitual, uncontrollable sin and overwhelming manifestation of the fruits of the Holy Spirit; which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). This called Abundant Life.

Our spiritual victory can be decisive and overwhelming. “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37). I’ve watched a few professional sports games where a team was losing and in the last minutes of the game pulled off a miracle and barely won. I’ve watched games where both teams fought hard and the winning team looked just as exhausted as the losers. This is not our victory. The game isn’t even close. We can completely trounce our enemies and walk off the battlefield rejuvenated with more strength than we started with. The power of our enemies pales compared to Christ’s love for us and the power of the Holy Spirit. Things may not always look like they are going our way, but “let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (Hebrews 4:16).

The life of victory is not a life in which there is no temptation. “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance” (James 1:2-4). Gold is tested in fire and our faith is far more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:6-7). Our Heavenly

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Father doesn't send temptation, but allows it. "God works all things together for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). The good being a strengthening of faith and ultimately union with Him. This is His perfect will, not having a bed of roses in this world.

The life of victory is not a life in which it is impossible to sin, but a life in which victory over sin is possible. "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own...But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:12-15). Victory is in losing a battle but winning the war. Victory is in refusing to feel remorseful and defeated after sin; but in the Sacrament of Reconciliation being cleansed of battle wounds and becoming stronger for the next battle. Each fall to sin can become a means of greater grace (Romans 5:20). Never give up. "For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again" (Proverbs 24:16).

Although a victorious life isn't won by human effort, it cannot be achieved without human effort. Jesus promised He would ask the Father to send an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to teach us and empower us (John 14:15-26). The Greek word for "Advocate" in this text is "parakletos", pronounced pah-RAH-klee-toss (Strong's Greek, 3875). Some Biblical translations use words such as "Comforter", "Helper" or "Counselor". Whatever term is used, the idea is the Holy Spirit guides us and tells us what to do. We are still responsible to do what the Holy Spirit commands. The Holy Spirit is not a pinch-hitter or stunt-double who will do all the work while we sit back, enjoy life and reap the spiritual benefits. Paul exhorts, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Jesus began the work and we need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to finish it. Saint Ignatius of Loyola said it best, "Pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on you" (Catechism, 2834).

If we sit back and expect God to do it all, He will allow us to fail every time until we start seeking Him with our whole heart.

## **Importance of attitudes**

Psychologists define attitudes as learned tendencies to view and judge things in a certain way. This can include judgment of people, issues, objects or events. "Attitude" is an umbrella term that consists of opinions, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, expectations, values, and intentions.

Attitudes are like eyeglasses. They don't change the reality of anything, but change how things are perceived. A good pair of eyeglasses can bring the world into focus, while the wrong prescription can distort the world. In the same way tinted glasses can make the world look darker or brighter, attitudes can make the world seem bright and happy, or dark and gloomy. The reality of the world is seldom perceived exactly as it is because everything is viewed through the filter of attitudes.

Attitudes have the power to nullify facts and reason. A long time ago, I owned a couple cars which turned out to be lemons. My experiences with those cars led me to develop a negative attitude towards certain car manufacturers. Since the day I was happy to get rid of those cars, I have never once considered owning another car from those manufacturers. Any time I needed a new car, I avoided stepping one foot onto a car lot geared to those manufacturers. There are some people I know who currently own cars by those manufacturers and tell me they don't have any problems. There are also auto reviews which recommend cars by those manufacturers. Maybe I'm overreacting. Maybe I can't let go. Or, maybe a bad attitude about those car manufacturers has made me blind. In any case, my mind is made up and I'm sticking with what I know, right or wrong. That's what attitude accomplishes.

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Because of their deep-rooted impact to emotions, behaviors and beliefs, attitudes cannot be ignored in a life of spiritual battles. Jesus is the truth and leads us to the truth. But the truth is too difficult to see through the eyes of Jesus while wearing the filtering lenses of attitudes. Attitudes lead Christians who profess to love God to be prejudiced against others and to avoid people with sins that are particularly loathsome to them. Attitudes lead to judgement and condemnation, denying the love Jesus calls us to. Attitudes lead Catholics to deny certain teachings of the Church. It's not because the truth has been revealed to them by Christ or there is Scripture to support what they want to believe. They are predisposed by attitudes and sin to believe something they already want to believe; eschewing faith in Jesus who is the Head of the Church (Catechism, 669).

## **Holiness brings a life of victory**

Without holiness, there can be no victory in this life. Attitudes and the flesh will usually be victorious unless there is a deep resolve to be united to Jesus, to do the Father's will and to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit. The world and spiritual adversaries are more powerful than Christians, but not more powerful than Christ. Christians who are not closely united to Jesus and lack full knowledge of Him are like sheep who have wandered away from the protection of the shepherd, becoming easy prey for wolves to devour.

The closer we are united to Jesus, the more we see everything through His eyes and the more we can respond to the world in accordance with His image. The closer we are united to the Father, the more we detach ourselves from attitudes and sin which turn us towards our own will. The closer we are united to the Holy Spirit, the more knowledge and power we have to overcome our spiritual enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil.

See *The Art of (Spiritual) War* at [www.catholicpaths.com](http://www.catholicpaths.com) for guidance and tips on winning the war against spiritual enemies.