

KAY ARTHUR



*Learning to Embrace Life's
Disappointments*

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REFINED

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AS SILVER REFINED

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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THE REFINER AND HIS FIRE



COME, LET ME TAKE YOU BACK to a Judean village in ancient days.

Inside a small, walled courtyard under a blue and blazing sky, there stands a refiner of metals. In his hands, gnarled with age, he is rolling and fingering a lump of ore. He watches the sun play on the streaks and veins of lead and other minerals running through this bit of rock chiseled from the bowels of the earth.

His experienced eye knows that, intermingled within this ore, there is silver.

He lays the ore on his worktable then builds his fire with care and the wisdom of years. Soon the flames are rising in the pit situated against the courtyard's stone wall.

At the worktable he picks up his hammer and begins crushing the lump into smaller pieces.

He pauses occasionally to stare at the fire, as if in study. From time to

time he places more fuel upon the already-blazing coals and works his bellows until the flames are in a frenzy.

When the fire is right, he gathers the hammered bits of ore from the place of their crushing and lays them in a small, sturdy container of tempered pottery—his crucible.

He places the crucible in the fire and sits down beside it. A long day is before him, and this is where he will stay for as long as the metal is subject to the flames. Silver is too precious to be forsaken in the furnace, too valuable to be ruined through inattention.

Carefully he watches the fire. It must be maintained at exactly the right temperature for the right duration of time to accomplish its purpose. Slowly the ore softens. The silver, with its greater density and lower melting point, liquefies first, hissing and bubbling as oxygen is released. The still-solid impurities rise to the top of the molten metal. This is the dross, and the refiner skims it off.

Now he adds bits of charcoal inside the crucible. He knows this will enhance the sheen of the silver. The carbon of the charcoal will keep the refined metal from reabsorbing oxygen from the air, which would only dull its finish.

He tends the fire, adds more fuel, and applies more air from the bellows.

Amid the relentless heat surrounding the crucible, more dull impurities, newly revealed, rise to the surface of the mixture.

Again the refiner carefully skims away the murky, smudgy metal floating at the top of the crucible. Gazing down upon the molten surface, the refiner sees at best but a dim reflection of himself.

The refiner works and watches and waits. The heat and its effect continue. More impurities rise to the surface, and again he skims them off.

He never leaves the crucible unattended, never steps away from the fire he has formed to do its work. The finished product he cherishes demands this process. Only his guided and guarded refinement will yield the promised and precious metal.

And he is not yet satisfied.

He lets the fire cool. Eventually he sets the crucible aside.

Then once again he builds up the fire, and the process begins all over. This time the skilled refiner makes the fire hotter. Within the crucible, new impurities are released, brought to the surface, exposed for what they are, then skimmed off.

Finally his leathery face breaks into a smile, for now as he gazes into the liquid silver his reflection is apparent—not yet sharp, but more distinct than before.

More hours pass as he perseveres in his anxious and delicate work.

And then . . . once more he bends over the crucible, and this time he catches his breath. There it is! In the silver he sees what he has waited for so patiently: a clear image of himself, distinct and sharp.

Delight banishes his frown. His task is done. The impurities are gone. The silver is refined.

He has his treasure.

He has “choice” silver, the most lustrous of all metals, beautiful and highly valued. It’s as pale and shining as the wings of a dove, as brilliant and splendid as the moon, worthy to become coin or trumpet or ornament, worthy to grace the king’s table or to reflect sunlight in a crown upon his head.

The refiner has taken what was impure and made it pure.

He has taken what was dull and made it beautiful.

Potential value has become actual value.

And the fire—the guarded, guided, relentless fire—made the difference. The fire allowed ordinary ore from the earth to be transformed into treasure.

All under the refiner’s watchful care, for all the while he never left it unattended.

WE ARE HIS SILVER

You and I are more than observers in this picture, beloved. This image of refinement is something God touches on again and again in His Word. He is the true Refiner. We are His silver.

And the fire is the fire of His making, for through His fire our Refiner will perfect an awesome work, a divine work. He will take what is impure and make it pure. He will take what is dull and make it beautiful. He'll take what is of potential value and reveal its actual value.

He will transform us into treasure.

He'll refine us in the crucible so that He can see *Himself* in the silver—in you and me. And so the world, as well as the principalities and powers and hosts of Satan, can behold the triumph of the Redeemer.

The fiery flames—the array of disappointing situations in our lives, from minor irritants to major tragedies—will make the difference.

Different flames, different fires will come and go. In the pressure of their heat we'll see the impurities in our lives being released and rising to the top. Then He'll skim them off, purifying us, refining us.

He'll make the fire a little hotter, causing new impurities to rise and be released, exposed for what they are. These, too, He'll lift away.

Early in our Christian lives He may see only a very dim image of Himself as He looks into our crucible. But as time goes on, His image becomes clearer, more lustrous, more beautiful.

And all the while, He never leaves or forsakes His treasure.

Our Refiner never leaves the crucible, never steps away from the fire.

He is always there to make sure every flame that reaches us is exactly the right temperature—not too hot!—to accomplish its work in our lives. He knows the precise temperature to maintain so we don't face more than we can bear. He tests and proves our faith, not to discredit us, but to show us how far we've come. He perfects our perseverance.

Years ago I filed away a copy of a poem called “The Refiner's Fire.” Now is the time to share it with you. Instead of silver, the metal here is gold, as in 1 Peter 1:7—“that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” But the process—and the Refiner's attitude—is just as we have seen, as the last two stanzas of this poem testify:

Can we think it pleases His loving heart
 To cause us a moment's pain?
 Ah, no, but He sees through the present cross
 The bliss of eternal gain.

So He waited there with a watchful eye
 With a love that is strong and sure,
 And His gold did not suffer a bit more heat
 Than was needed to make it pure.

A CHERISHED PICTURE

The Refiner's fire is a picture of great worth and importance to God, one He refers to often in His Word. Let me share a few of these verses with you as we begin our study of how to handle the disappointments and difficulties God uses to refine us.

"The refining pot is for silver . . .," He says, "but the LORD tests hearts" (Proverbs 17:3).

"The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is tested by the praise accorded him" (Proverbs 27:21). Even the praise we receive can be a refining and testing fire.

"The tongue of the righteous is as *choice silver*" (Proverbs 10:20).

He even uses this image as a picture of His own Word: The words of the LORD are *pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times*" (Psalm 12:6). Seven is the number of completion, perfection—God's Word is perfect and complete. And you will be too as you learn to respond to the fires in a way pleasing to God.

The Lord promises to bring His people *"through the fire,"* and to *"refine them as silver is refined,* and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, "The LORD is my God'" (Zechariah 13:9).

We can all tell the Lord what the psalmist acknowledged, "For Thou

hast *tried* us, O God; Thou hast *refined us as silver is refined*” (Psalm 66:10).

REJECTED SILVER

Yet unfortunately, there are times when God’s refinement fires are of no avail.

Why? Because you and I can resist and ruin God’s refining process. Jeremiah 6:29-30 describes this very situation as God speaks of His people Israel:

The bellows blow fiercely,
 the lead is consumed by the fire;
 in vain the refining goes on,
 but the wicked are not separated.
 They call them rejected silver,
 because the LORD has rejected them.

The fire burns and burns. But the dross—the wickedness, the impurities—is not allowed to be released and removed. Instead it’s held on to, stubbornly clung to, no matter how hot the Refiner’s fire.

So the silver becomes rejected silver or, as the King James Version puts it, “reprobate silver.”

Therefore the Refiner must reject it. It is impure and unusable and unattractive.

God will send the fire several times and with increasing heat to get rid of those impurities, those un-Christlike things in your life and mine, beloved. But if we insist on hanging on to them, then God must set us aside. He’ll call us reprobate silver—rejected for His use.

Could there be any more tragic and fearful condition for a Christian than to hear God say, “I cannot use you”?

PROVEN AND QUALIFIED

Paul abhorred the possibility of becoming God's castaway. In 1 Corinthians 9:27 he spoke of his fear that "after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." This word for *disqualified* is *adokimos*, meaning "without approval"—unfit for the Master's use. *Adokimos* is the negative form of the Greek word used in James 1:3 for the "proving" or "testing" (*dokimos*) of our faith, the proving that happens as we "consider it all joy" (James 1:2) when we encounter various trials.

If we respond correctly to the Refiner's fire, we find our proven faith producing endurance in our lives. We will exercise the self-control in "all things" that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:25—the self-control that brings our flesh under subjection to the Holy Spirit, delivering a blow, a technical knockout to "self."

It means running in such a way as to win the prize, as Paul also said in that passage.

But if we respond wrongly to the Refiner's fire, we will find ourselves unproven and disqualified. This is the consequence—the awful, wasteful consequence—of failing to let God complete His purifying work in our lives.

I can't use you.

Oh, my friend, there is nothing greater in all this world than being used by God . . .

Nothing greater than knowing you've been obedient to what God has called you to be . . .

Nothing greater than hearing from the lips of the Father, "Well done, My good and faithful servant" . . .

Nothing greater than knowing you have pleased the One who gave His all so that we who were nothing might know the greatness of being reformed into His image . . .

Nothing greater than being used by God to do the work of God, to reach out and introduce others to Him, to His family, to His life.

There's *nothing* greater.

How my heart aches for those so self-centered, so wrapped up in themselves and their own world, in their own happiness and fulfillment and success, that they won't bend their knees and bow their heads and find out from God why He put them on this earth.

Beloved, we have much to explore about all of this.

We'll look at what it means to respond to the Refiner's fire so that *refinement* truly happens.

And we'll look at the dangerous alternative, which triggers a process of downward degeneration in a deadly, depressing spiral.

We want to understand all this well—because the good fire of our loving Refiner is burning. It burns for your good and His glory. You need not fear, for He never leaves the fire unattended or attended by someone else. He is always there . . . the perfect Refiner watching over you—His redeemed silver.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God.

EPHESIANS 6:13

C H A P T E R O N E

WHEN YOU FEEL YOU'RE A FAILURE

Resisting the Spiral of Defeat



I WAS A FAILURE. I was convinced of it. I had failed God, and there was nothing I could do about it. I was impotent to change my circumstances. Disappointment overwhelmed me.

My dreams for being a missionary had been shattered. We were home in a small, rented, three-bedroom house after just three and a half years in Mexico, and Jack didn't even have a permanent job.

I was only about four and a half years old in the Lord, but I'd wanted to serve Him ever since I was saved at the age of twenty-nine. My first husband had committed suicide not long after I became a child of God, but I was convinced (even before I remarried) that the mission field was for me—even if for some reason God didn't give me a husband and father for my two sons.

Then along came Jack, the seasoned missionary whom God had told me I would marry before I ever met him face to face. Before we met, Jack

had served with the Pocket Testament League in more than thirty countries in Africa and Latin America. Except for a few months, we had spent almost our entire four years of married life in Guadalajara. Jack assisted other missionaries in Mexico through film evangelization and literature distribution. Meanwhile I worked with English-speaking teens in Guadalajara. And that was very fulfilling for me as I saw many of them come to the Lord. Seldom did a day go by without one or more of the teenagers visiting in our home. Our house became their Bible school—and mine—as I spent hours in the Word, studying diligently and then teaching the teens what I learned. Those were wonderful days.

At times I traveled with Jack to remote villages, where I used my nursing skills to minister to people who were in need—spiritually and physically.

I absolutely loved being a missionary.

And I loved Mexico. As I drove the streets of Guadalajara, shopped in the open *mercado*, and tried talking to the warm-hearted Mexican people in my limited Spanish, I felt I was home—exactly where I belonged. I loved the people. I loved the country. I loved serving God there. I thought, *This is where I'll be when Jesus comes*. Little did I know that the onset of chest pains would keep my dreams from coming true.

The chest pains began without warning and kept getting worse. Often I found myself nearly out of breath.

Jack insisted I see a doctor. The examination and cardiogram revealed that I had pericarditis, an infection in the lining of my heart. I was confined to bed, allowed out just once a day and then only as far as the bathroom.

Jack put a halt to all the visits from teenagers. When I was able to travel, he sent me to the States to be examined by a cardiologist I once had worked for. Dr. Mullady's recommendation to leave Mexico was all it took for Jack to pack us up and move us back to the U.S.

I wept. I grieved. I agonized in prayer, crying out to God in my sense of failure. I mourned the fact that I had taken a much-needed man off the

mission field. Through my physical weakness I had brought Jack's thirteen-year missionary career to a halt. Now Jack was helping some friends in their Christian bookstore and had applied for a job with a Christian radio station, but no other work had materialized. Before becoming a missionary Jack had sold insurance, but that had been so long ago, and I wanted a husband in some sort of full-time ministry . . .

For weeks I lived in torment of mind and heart, until the morning I rolled out of bed onto my knees and prayed, "Father, *whatever You want*. If You want Jack to sell insurance again, it's okay; I will accept it." God could do as He pleased. He was the Potter—I the clay.

That morning on my knees I surrendered my expectations, my desires, and my evaluations to my God. And in my submission came my peace.

TO BE SIFTED LIKE WHEAT

Oh my friend, has there been a time in your life when disappointment in your circumstances or your relationships sent you into an emotional tail-spin? Did clouds of defeat and depression blow in, obliterating the joy you felt even on a breezy, bright, sunshiny day?

What did you do? How did you handle it? Did it throw you for the proverbial loop?

And what if a crushing disappointment came your way today or tomorrow—do you have the assurance that you could face it in such a way that it would become a steppingstone toward greater godliness rather than a stumbling block to plummet you into defeat, depression, and despair?

Surely by now you realize that if you are going to live for God you will not go unopposed.

Just before Jesus was betrayed and arrested, He turned to Peter and said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31).

Peter was but the first! The devil—that serpent of old—wants the same

opportunity to sift you and me. Once you come out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God, then want it or not it's war—warfare with the prince of this world. And although you can never be snatched from the Father's hand, the devil of darkness will do everything he can to keep you from being an effective witness for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, warfare is inevitable.

Therefore one is very wise to learn the strategy of the enemy of our souls.

Our enemy has at least three major strategies for weakening us before the major battles come. One of them is simple *distraction*. He wants us to focus on anything except what is truly important. How often are you and I like Martha, drawn away and distracted from *the one thing that is needful* (Luke 10:40-42, KJV)?

The one thing “needful” is to sit at His feet and learn of Him; yet the pressures and pleasures of life can so easily distract—as do the pressures of ministry, the busyness of serving the Lord. And believe me, the more your ministry broadens, the greater will be the distractions! I think this is why we've seen so many Christian “celebrities” fall. The dangers of our time should put a holy fear within us. This is a day when Christendom focuses more on the messenger than on the message or on the God of the message and the Book of the message. (We could discuss this one for quite some time, couldn't we?)

Another strategy of the enemy is *deception*, which can often be the result of distraction. When we don't have time to stay in the Word, we're far more easily deceived. Deception looms large in the portrait God's Word gives us of our enemy. Jesus said the devil “does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies” (John 8:44). This “father of lies” has always challenged the authenticity of God's Word, right from the beginning. And any lie he can convince us of will have a negative effect on how we think and act and respond in various situations.

Distraction and *deception*—these are “Deadly D's,” and to understand

and overcome these strategies we would do well to study them carefully. But that's another book. In this one I want to move from guerrilla warfare to the major battles of five other Deadly D's: disappointment, discouragement, dejection, despair, and demoralization. They represent another strategy of the enemy, a strategy with several layers. Together they form a downward spiral of deepening defeat and disorder. They're part of a devastating plunge that's triggered when we respond wrongly to the disappointments that God in His loving sovereignty allows in our lives.

I was first introduced to the concept of these five Deadly D's by Dr. Joseph Carroll of the Evangelical Institute of Greenville in Greenville, South Carolina. Over the years as I've pondered and dug deeper into these strategies of the enemy, God has used what He taught me to lead me and others in glorious victory when we could have suffered a shameful and needless defeat.

The downward spiral begins, as I mentioned, with *disappointment*. Disappointment comes when our expectations aren't met. Consequently we're not happy about it—we're disturbed.

When this happens and we don't conquer that disappointment in God's way, then we spin downward into *discouragement*. We're without courage. We want to give up. We want to quit because we're disheartened. We're ready to run rather than deal with the situation. Isn't this evident today as we see many who, in the face of adversities, name the name of Christ while throwing up their hands or shoving them into their pockets? They walk out; they run away. Their fighting spirit—their spunk—is gone.

And what follows discouragement? Depression in its various degrees.

The first "degree" of depression is *dejection*—a lowness of spirit, a feeling of spiritual and emotional fatigue.

If not reversed this dejection takes us down even further, plunging us into *despair* and finally into utter *demoralization*. At this stage of descent, hope is entirely abandoned and is replaced by apathy and numbness. Fear becomes overwhelming and paralyzing and can degenerate further into disorder and reckless action that is heedless of consequences.

When you pause to think about all this, can't you see that these are the tactics Satan is using to defeat so many of God's children today?

The question is, How well do you understand them? How quickly can you recognize them in your own life or in the lives of others around you? How quickly and confidently can you blast them out of their strongholds with the ammunition of God's truth?

Let's pause for a minute while you reflect on the last time you encountered a disappointment. How did you handle it? Where did it lead?

When was the last time you were truly discouraged, lacking in confidence, ready to give up on something when God wanted you to keep going? What triggered your discouragement? How did you respond?

And what about the degrees of depression—dejection, despair, demoralization? Have you had to deal with these paralyzing feelings when they felt so real they seemed truer than anything the Word of God has to say? What led to this state?

Have you ever felt hopeless, as if you'd fallen into an old, abandoned well in a wilderness with no way to climb out and no one to hear your plea for help? What did you learn from that situation?

Or could it be, beloved, that you're still there?

If you are, your cry has been heard. Help is here!

If in any way you've tasted the wretched awfulness of these Deadly D's—or if you have friends or loved ones (or recently turned enemies) who are in the heat of this warfare—I believe you'll find great help in this book in the form of insights from the Bible and from the instructive experiences the Lord has graciously given me and others. If I didn't believe this, I would never have taken the time to write this book. But as I've taught these things, a great many listeners have later caught my hand to say, "It saved my life, Kay, and I mean that literally." Lives, relationships, marriages—and minds—have been "saved," rescued from the enemy's prison camps simply because truth sets us free!

My goal is that no matter how fierce or long the battles we face, you and I together will be able to say, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

PRINCIPLES OF WARFARE

Now let's look at some principles of warfare that hold true in the spiritual as well as the physical realm.

Throughout the New Testament (and with a concentration of teaching in Ephesians) God reminds us that *we are in a conflict*—not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. Therefore it's essential that you understand the tactics of the enemy so you won't be caught off guard. If you don't recognize your enemy for what he is and if you aren't aware of his tricks and devices (which God warns us about through the apostle Paul), the prince of the realm of darkness will establish a beachhead that will make it easier for him to push his way into your life until he holds you captive in his stronghold.

One reason for Israel's years of dark defeat, which are described in the book of Judges, was that after the passing away of Joshua's generation—those who had conquered and occupied the Promised Land—"there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel" (2:10). So what did the Lord do to strengthen this unknowing and unproven generation? He left some of Israel's enemies in the land of Canaan "*to test Israel . . . that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war*, those who had not experienced it formerly" (3:1-2).

We need to be "taught war"—and to know and understand our enemy. Our enemy is not just the devil but the entire world system that's opposed to God. How does this enemy wage war? What are the tactics and the weapons we face? And what do we have to counteract them?

We dare not go into battle unprepared!

War movies have always fascinated me. Years ago when I was leading our ministry's summer "boot camp" for teens, I used the old movie *Battle of the Bulge* to visually engrave in the minds of our young people some principles that hold not only in military battles but also in spiritual warfare.

Paul did something similar in his day when he used the Roman soldier

and his armor as visual illustrations to strengthen God's people for their spiritual battles. In his last letter to his beloved son in the faith, he admonished Timothy to "suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3). Paul was adamant that Timothy not entangle himself in the affairs of this life so that he might please the One who had called him to be a soldier.

My goal for you, beloved, is the same—to prepare you to be a good soldier for the Lord Jesus Christ. (By the way, I want you to know I call you "beloved" because that's what God calls you time and again in the New Testament books written by Paul, Peter, and the boys. It's a manly term!) To help us understand the principles of warfare, let's explore a particular event in history. In 1944, the Second World War was in its fifth year in Europe. German troops still controlled most of the Continent. But on June 6, Allied forces under Gen. Dwight Eisenhower crossed the English Channel in five thousand ships and invaded Normandy in northern France. It was the long-awaited D-Day, the result of months of careful planning, with due respect to proven principles of war: the concentration and economy of forces, careful intelligence, and offensive action incorporating the element of surprise.

By August, the Allies had liberated Paris from the Germans. But then the Allied advance into Europe's interior was in danger of being halted. Supplies, which had to be hauled hundreds of miles inland from the coast, became seriously depleted.

Another problem facing Eisenhower was the strong rivalry between his most famous generals, Patton, the American, and Montgomery, who was British. Both wanted to be the first to capture and enter Berlin. However, both needed supplies—Patton in the south and Montgomery in the north—and there was not enough for both.

In September, Montgomery devised a spectacular plan to shorten the war by transporting thirty-five thousand men some three hundred miles behind enemy lines into Holland. Under pressure from his superiors, Eisenhower approved the plan, and Operation Market Garden was born. The

time seemed right, especially because the German military effort was becoming increasingly disorganized.

“Market” was the code name for the airborne operation, “Garden” for the ground advance. Airborne troops were to be dropped astride three major Dutch rivers. The plan was to seize and hold seven key bridges. The Allies would then be in position to outflank the enemy and drive into Germany itself across a relatively open plain. From there they would turn into Germany’s industrial heartland.

This was the biggest operation since D-Day. But it was not planned or executed nearly as carefully as the Normandy invasion had been. In the rush to conquer, basic combat principles were bypassed. As a result, Operation Market Garden was a failure that cost the lives of thousands of Allied troops.

You cannot ignore basic warfare principles and expect to win battles. Therefore warriors in training for military service are taught the following basic principles, which remain consistently true.

One of them is that of *concentration*, the ability to mass one’s forces at a critical time and at a critical place for a decisive action.

In a war there are always battle lines dividing the territories held by opposing forces. Your enemy tries to break through the line and take territory that you hold. His best way to make a breakthrough is to amass his forces at a critical time and place.

Imagine the situation: After discovering a weak spot in your defensive line, the enemy lines up an arrowhead formation against it. He strikes suddenly with the steel tip of his arrow—one hundred tanks. Once this strategic penetration is achieved, a bigger enemy force of five hundred tanks follows right behind, widening the breach in your line. Behind that force is yet a bigger wave of a thousand tanks followed by twenty thousand infantry ready to devour your collapsing defense and then to occupy and hold the newly conquered territory.

Another key principle of warfare is that of *offensive action*. As one military historian puts it, going on the offensive allows the attacker “to exercise initiative and impose his will upon the enemy; to set the pace and

determine the course of battle, to exploit enemy weaknesses and rapidly changing situations, and to meet unexpected developments.”

The enemy of our souls—who’s a master of warfare—understands these principles well. He’s on the offensive, ready to invade. He’s a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour, as Peter says. When a disappointment comes our way (and in this life disappointments will always keep coming), our failure to respond in a biblical way will produce a weak spot in our mental and emotional defensive line. The enemy will take advantage of our weakness to cross that line with more wrong thoughts and feelings that take us down into discouragement.

The breach is then opened. To conquer and hold more territory in our thought life and emotional being, this deceiver needs only to bring in more and more forces, dragging us down into dejection and despair. He has established his stronghold.

The razor-sharp point of a steel-tipped arrow is small and penetrates flesh quite easily. If only the tip has entered, it can be pulled out easily. But once the full arrowhead has penetrated into the underlying muscle, it can only be cut out or pushed on through; it cannot be pulled out.

If the enemy’s first attack against a certain area of your life succeeds in achieving a penetration, he’ll bring more and more and more of his might against you until you are demoralized—flattened, unable to get up, your face buried in the dirt and held there by the pressure of the enemy’s combat boot.

And where is this struggle fought? On what front?

YOUR MIND IS THE BATTLEGROUND

The front line is always the mind. Never forget that principle, for understanding it is the key to winning the war.

Listen to what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but

divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are *taking every thought captive* to the obedience of Christ.

We war, but not according to the flesh. With our divinely powerful weapons, we are able to take every *thought* captive to the obedience of Christ. *We are able*—but whether we *do it* is another story!

Just don't forget—*never* forget—that your mind is the battleground!

Satan will attack your mind with imaginations and thoughts that are contrary to what God says in His Word. These ideas and perceptions will be a perversion of His truth about you. These thoughts will be nothing more than disinformation and distortion.

Therefore we don't war after the flesh. Remember what God said: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal [or fleshly], but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and *bringing into captivity every thought* to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, KJV).

At any moment, if you are experiencing anything but victory, if your thoughts are anything less than obedient to Jesus Christ, stop and ask yourself: *Why* am I feeling this way? *Why* am I thinking these thoughts?

Do you realize that *how you think* really determines how you behave? So consider your thought patterns. Ponder how they affect you. "Ponder the path of thy feet" (Proverbs 4:26, KJV). We so seldom stop and do this! We just react instead of taking a cognitive plan of action.

"*Consider* your ways!" the Lord told His people (Haggai 1:5,7).

Jesus called upon His followers *to think*. Do you recall how before telling a parable to His disciples He sometimes asked, "What do you think?" (Matthew 18:12, 21:28). He wanted them to *think* rightly, to reason correctly. "What do you think about the Christ?" He asked them (Matthew 22:42). He said to Peter, "What do you *think*, Simon?" (17:25).

Beloved, what do you *think*?

Satan chooses the mind for his battleground because he understands so well the principle laid down in the Word, that as a man thinketh so he is (see Proverbs 23:7, KJV). Satan knows if he can capture your mind he can capture your body. Isn't this the purpose of brainwashing prisoners? Brainwash them, and you can do with them as you please! (This is illustrated strongly, by the way, in another good war movie, *The Manchurian Candidate*.)

Therefore, either you must learn to take your thoughts captive—or the deceiver will take you captive with your thoughts!

And what kind of thoughts does he attack your mind with? Paul described them in 2 Corinthians 10:5 as thoughts that are “raised up against the knowledge of God.” Satan will attack your mind with imaginations or with thoughts that are contrary to or a perversion of God's Word.

I think of David when he went forth against Goliath and shouted, “Who are you who comes against the armies of the living God!” David's mind-set wasn't on how big this guy was—no, it was “Who do you *think* you are?”

That's why we're told, “Be transformed by the renewing of your *mind*” (Romans 12:2).

Your mind is all-important. What is yours dwelling on? Scripture tells us, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, *let your mind dwell on these things*” (Philippians 4:8).

Be careful, beloved, about what you let into your mind. As Jesus said, “Therefore *take care how you listen*; for whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him” (Luke 8:18).

NEVER A Foothold

You and I cannot prevent the enemy from directing his fiery arrows of wrong thoughts toward our minds. But we can keep him from achieving victory with these Deadly D's *by never permitting a penetration*.

This is the secret of victory: Never allow a penetration. Have you got that? This is imperative, and you may want to underline it here: *Never allow a penetration*. Don't allow the enemy to get his foot in the door. If you do, he'll have the leverage to push his way far deeper into your life.

These are our commands from General Headquarters: "Do not give the devil an opportunity" (Ephesians 4:27) and "*Be on the alert*. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. *But resist him*, firm in your faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Our enemy cannot be seen: "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). Yet God has given us spiritual armor, all of it having to do with God Himself and His Word, including our two-edged sword, the Word of God (6:17). We also have the belt of truth, the breastplate of His righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and the shield of faith by which we're able to quench all the fiery darts of the enemy.

We *do* have *all* the armor we need to keep him from making a penetration.

We also have the principles of warfare that can work *for* us even more than our enemy uses them against us.

Communication, for example, is a critical principle in warfare. Lines of communication must be kept open. How well this is illustrated in the movie *A Bridge Too Far*, which tells the story of Operation Market Garden. Some of the Allied soldiers who had parachuted behind enemy lines were issued inadequate radio equipment and later were unable to communicate that they weren't where they were supposed to be. Then Allied supply planes flew over and unknowingly dropped their supplies into German-held territory. Watching the planes fly over, the Allied soldiers lit fires, waved their clothing, screamed, and jumped up and down to try to get the attention of their pilots. But the pilots were trained to ignore such activity lest it be a ruse of the enemy.

That brings up another vital principle, that of *supply*. A war cannot be

won without weapons, ammunition, food, and all kinds of gear and equipment. Therefore one of the enemy's primary tasks is to cut off supply lines.

Remember, my fellow soldier, to stay in communication with General Headquarters so you can receive His rich supply of everything you need. When our Lord tells us to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” and to “put on the full armor of God that [we] may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-11), you and I can rest assured that everything we need in order to be more than conquerors is ours.

So let your requests be made known to God. Your Commanding General has said, “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2, KJV) and, “I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that *whatever you ask of the Father in My name*, He may give to you” (John 15:16).

Yet another critical principle of warfare is that of *objective*, which is defined this way: “Every military operation must be directed toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.” The reason so many Christians fail in spiritual warfare is that we've ignored the right of the Lord Jesus Christ to have supreme authority and rulership in our life. *His* objectives for us—to conquer ungodliness, to be holy even as He is holy—are not *our* objectives. Instead our desire so often is to be our own commander (until, of course, we eventually find ourselves hopelessly trapped).

Imagine yourself with Joshua just before the battle of Jericho:

He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?”

And he said, “No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD.”

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, “What has my lord to say to his servant?”

And the captain of the LORD's host said to Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15)

Remember, beloved believer: There is only one Captain of the host. So follow *Him*.

Intelligence is another key principle in warfare. So often in history one side in a conflict is victorious because of crucial information collected about the other side's leadership and decision-makers. They're able to anticipate what course of action their enemy will take in battle. How well this is illustrated in another good World War II movie, *Midway*, which shows how God supernaturally intervened to turn the tide of battle in the Pacific. (I told you I liked war movies!)

In the Bible God has given you a profile of your enemy: He's the liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Your enemy is the deceiver of the world and the accuser of the brethren, accusing them night and day (Revelation 12:9-10). That's what your enemy is like—so don't listen to him! He's a Tokyo Rose of the worst sort.

Are you perhaps engaged in warfare with the enemy of your soul and finding yourself losing the battle? O dear child of God, you don't have to lose the war! You can be set free from your enemy's prison. Of course he would like to torture you until you lose all hope, turn your back on your country, deny your King, and become a traitor. But remember that "greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36).

Remember, beloved believer: The outcome of the war is already determined. Jesus is victor, and all who align themselves with Him will be more than conquerors. And the promises of God are the concentration and mass of force that you need to unload on the enemy. Determine to prove these promises true. Make it your passion! If you do, you'll find yourself winning each and every battle. God would never send you into a battle you can't win—He's not that kind of foolish commander. (Look at Psalm 91.)

When you're hit with disappointment, you *can* hold your line of defense by being strong in the Lord—as we'll carefully and confidently explore in the pages to come.

So pause and reflect on what you have learned—and discuss it with God.

And now may I pray with you . . . for you . . .

I pray, Lord, that You will cup my friend's face in Your hands and give assurance that the thoughts You have for him or her are like the thoughts You shared with Your chosen nation of Israel—thoughts of good and not of evil, of welfare and not of calamity, to give a future and a hope.

Father, show my friend that no matter what forces the enemy amasses against us, we can be more than conquerors through Christ Jesus who loved us.

O Father, I ask You now to bring these truths home and to so pierce our hearts that as more than conquerors we will be able to stand against all the wiles and devices of the enemy, holding the ground of faith and not yielding.

I thank You now for what You're going to do. As we study this subject together, anoint us from on high. Give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Your Word—the same sword by which You will someday smite the enemy in eternal defeat.

Now unto You, O Father, be all praise and honor, for it belongs to You and to You alone. Amen.



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