

YES!

By Marty Delmon

Hiding my face in the folds of my mother's tweed coat, I dared to peek at the man standing before her. The blue of his military uniform seemed too austere to touch while the gleam of gold brandishing from the braid and various medals on his chest seemed too enticing not to touch. By the lure of that gold I was drawn into his arms where he bravely announced he was going to be my new father, which gave me the audacity to finger the braid.

I saw that uniform again the day he stood before an altar with my mother and they married. But by then those arms had become home to me and I frolicked about the event in my navy blue suit, chosen by four-year old me to look like my new Daddy.

The day arrived in which they took me to a court of law where we approached a desk that seemed to be elevated to heaven. The judge had to climb little stairs to get to his chair. Polished wood reached to the vaulted ceiling as I looked up, up, up to see his scowling face leaning over the desk to glare at me. A white, stiff collar circled his neck and black cloth draped from the collar over his shoulders and arms, engulfing the judge in what appeared to be death shrouds. His clouded countenance defied me to squirm or even lift my foot.

My mother stood on one side; my father-to-be on the other and we three were anchored to the floor with our necks stretched back to see the judge in his heights. He leaned on one hand with his elbow askew, gazing over his glasses and he bellowed from his altitude, "Little girl, do you want to have a new Daddy?"

Trying not to move my lips under his scrutinizing stare I said, "Yes."

The judge picked up a little hammer, slammed it on the top of his desk, which made us all jump, and said, "So be it!"

With that I had a new Daddy. All I did was say yes and a new father was given to me. People smiled, shook hands, patted me on the back and a bunch of us went out to lunch, a real treat in those days.

That Daddy turned out to be better than some and worse than others. He ended his life in alcoholism and committed suicide. He afforded me many opportunities to enjoy life from positive, affirming activities and gave me many more opportunities to overcome negativity, pessimism, tragedy and destruction.

When things got bad in my own life, that same spirit of suicide settled on me. All I could do was rock in my rocking chair and cry, thinking of ways to end my life. Some friends heard of my plight and came to see me with an offer to put me into a home business, believing a change of activity would jar me out of my profound depression.

After they left I reflected on who would join me in this business, and only one person came to mind, my aunt, who lived in the mountains. When I drove up to see her and explained the business, she said, "Sure, sure. But first I have a prayer meeting to go to. Come with me and we can talk afterwards."

I figured - anything for a sale - so I went. Being a sweltering night in August, the prayer group, about 10 people, pulled chairs into the parking lot to form a circle. There was no relief to be found but it was better than being in a suffocating building.

When the time arrived to close our eyes and begin praying, I realized I had never done this before. Oh, yes, I had thrown prayers to heaven; however I had never waited for the answer. But my biggest realization came in knowing I was willing to do it, willing to actually pray, willing to have a two-way conversation with God.

When I closed my eyes a bright, white light appeared before me that emitted such heat I thought my skin would peel off and sent such wind that I felt my hair was plastered back on my head from the force of it. My logical mind had to explain these phenomena and I told myself a wind must have come up and the sun, in setting, was shining on me full force. I cracked open one eye and looked. The sun had already set and not even a breeze stirred in the trees.

I shut my eyes again and the phenomena reappeared. Having no other choice, and being curious, I watched the light and saw the classic figure of Jesus step forth. He wore a white robe with a white rope tied around His waist and His feet were bare. He looked like any picture I had ever seen of Him, pale, soft, slender, long brown hair; just one thing differed: His eyes. His eyes pierced through me. They resembled crystals refracting and intensifying the light. If a color could have been ascribed to them it would be blue, but mainly they can best be described as fire and light. I could not look away; His eyes captured me. He spread His hands out in the most welcoming gesture I had ever seen and said, "Come unto Me."

It was so real I started to get out of my chair to go to Him when I heard the Pastor say, "Amen." I opened my eyes, as did everyone else, and what I thought had been two minutes had been two hours. I must have been in a trance!

Nothing changed in me that night. I did not get "born-again" as the Bible commands; Jesus did not become my Lord;

nothing happened because I did not say, "Yes." I had a strong experience, but strong experiences do not make someone a Christian. However, the desire to go to church stirred in me so I started taking my children to an Episcopalian church on the corner.

One day, while walking to church I heard an audible voice say, "Marty, you've come a long way but you have one more step to take."

So shocked to hear a voice like that, I responded spontaneously, "What step is that?"

"You must say with your mouth that I am your Lord."

Rage rose up in me! No one was going to be my Lord but me! I wrestled with the Lordship of my life all during church. Finally, when we approached the altar to take communion, knowing I needed to say "Yes" to the Lordship of Jesus, I knelt down by the railing and looked up at the cross. I said, "Okay, Jesus, You are my Lord." I felt something cold leave my body, exiting through my feet and something warm and wonderful entered my body impacting me from the front.

Just then the layman serving the wine came to me with the cup and said, "Marty, the blood of Jesus shed for you."

Later, in the courtyard where the congregation gathered for coffee and cookies, that layman came and asked, "Is your name Marty?"

I said, "Yes."

He breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, thank goodness. The Lord told me to say that name but I didn't know what your name was. I did it out of obedience."

I had never met this man before so I could imagine his discomfort at saying a name he did not know. I didn't tell him, but he was like the judge who gave me a new Daddy. His words, "Marty, the blood of Jesus shed for you," were the hammer that said, "So be it!" I was, indeed, a new creature inside. Made of the same stuff as my new Daddy, I had been born again in that I received a new "inner-being", one in harmony with God.

The Bible describes that experience like this:

John 3:3, 8 "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Gal 4:4, 5 "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,"

5 "to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

1 Peter 1:23 "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible..."

1 John 5:1 "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..."

This new birth experience is available to anyone who is ready to receive Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior. To receive someone you open the door to them and welcome them into your home, or office, or wherever your territory happens to be. The Spanish have a saying, "My house is your house." That's what we do with Jesus. In essence we say to Him, "My house is Your house." To receive Jesus you open your heart, the door to your house, you expose your innermost thoughts and feelings like the private rooms of your home and invite Him to live there.

A very simple prayer can be said, as long as it is done with sincerity and truth. Something like,

"Father, please forgive my sins. Jesus, please come live in my heart. Make me into the person you want me to be. Be my Lord. Live Your life through me. Amen."

Once He moves into your house, which He is very eager to do, He will start rearranging the furniture in order to make Himself comfortable. He will take your old pattern of negative thinking and change it into possibility thinking. Your unresolved feelings will be transformed by His presence and you'll find yourself forgiving people you thought you could never forgive.

This takes time as He is a gentle tenant and He never does anything that you are not willing for Him to do. He has more patience than even Job had and He will wait for you. The process is called "Growing Up Spiritually".

You see, when you are born again you become a baby, spiritually. Your body doesn't get born again; it stays the same as it ever was. If you were skinny beforehand, you will be skinny afterwards! Your mind doesn't get born again; it stays the same as it ever was. My level of intelligence didn't change. Your emotions don't get born again; they stay the same as they ever were. I continued to feel like an unwanted child. It's your spirit that gets born again! The essence of your being is brand new! My spirit being became flooded with joy and love and inundated my body, inundated my mind, gave me wisdom I never had

before and inundated my emotions. I became happy to be a wanted child of God!

But there was much to learn, like how to know the voice of God. There are so many voices speaking to us that it is difficult to discern which is which. I followed one voice after another, finally realizing by what each voice produced, that those were not the voices of God. So I asked someone who seemed to know and she said, "The voice of God always affirms. Even when He is correcting you, He does it by affirming you." There was only one voice speaking like that. From then on I knew the voice of God. The rest of the voices were always condemning, warning, criticizing and destroying. But God is love. Whatever He says is full of love.

Since we have a new Daddy, our God of love, we need to learn how things operate in His house. He didn't move into our house to be at our beck and call, although like any good Daddy He responds to everything we ask for, and in His case even think of, and He responds above and beyond what we ask for or think about. He moved into our house to make it His house because the Bible says we become His Temple. We need to learn how to be that Temple.

A passage in 1 John 2 gives an explanation of spiritual growth.

12 "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father.

14 I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one."

Let me put this in outline form:

1. Little children
 - a. Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.
 - b. You have known the Father.
2. Young men
 - a. You have overcome the wicked one.
 - b. You are strong.
 - c. The word of God abides in you.
 - d. You have overcome the wicked one (2x - must be significant!).

15 Fathers

- a. You have known Him who is from the beginning.
- b. You have known Him who is from the beginning (2x - must be important!).

Spiritual growth comes by progression. It is a continuous work done by the Lord living inside of us, changing us into the image of Jesus Christ. It doesn't happen overnight. The reason you see so many babies in the Body of Christ is because people don't like to change, or they get stuck in one stage and don't pass on to the next. Your level of maturity depends on you and the spiritual work you are willing to do on yourself as the Lord urges you to change. Jesus leads you and you do the chores He asks of you.

It's kind of like cleaning your room. Mom sends you in there on a Saturday morning and you can either really get the dirt out, or you can cover it up and make it look good in case she only glances in from the hallway. As a kid I could cram a lot of stuff in my closet, shut the door and my Mom would never be the wiser until I ran out of clean clothes. The cover-up always catches-up so you might as well do the chores and clean-up the inside.

To do this you have to start at the bottom so let's start with Spiritual Childhood. The first step in the Spiritual Outline is:

FORGIVENESS

1. Your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

When you invoke the name of Jesus for your salvation your sins are wiped away. With the new birth comes the complete forgiveness of your sins, past, present and future. Jesus paid for them on the cross and once you accept Him as your Lord and Savior the price He paid applies to you. Every sin is paid for! That's good news!

The spiritual growth stage of childhood is a period of letting go of all the sins. Instead of carrying around a sack of shame all our lives, we can now let go of our past because it is forgiven. There are sins that feel like old friends. A little anguish accompanies opening the sack and setting them free, but the room it makes for new and wonderful experiences is well worth releasing them. Some sins are obvious.

Gal 5:19 "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies,

outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

But other sins are not so obvious, like unforgiveness. Sometimes we don't know there is a lack of forgiveness in us until we root around and bring it into the light. We just avoid certain people, that's all. We tell ourselves they don't fit into our lives anymore. We cover up the unforgivenesses in our souls so we don't have to acknowledge they are there.

In my own life it seemed like more people rejected me than accepted me, and their rejection was not petty. It was a major affront and wounded me deeply. How could I forgive such behavior? But some stories I hear are so much worse than mine! How can these people forgive?

I met a man whose mother, when he was five years old, took him outside, locked the door, sat him on the steps to the house, got in the car, drove away and never came back. His father had disappeared years before. Finally, when it got dark, the boy went to a neighbor who called the police. They placed him in a foster home. He grew up going from home to home year after year.

When this man received Christ he knew he had to forgive his mother. He hired a detective agency to find her, went to her and told her he forgave her. Instead of inviting him inside she slammed the door in his face. He shouted, "Its okay, Mom. I even forgive you of that!" He bombarded her with gifts and cards until finally she received him and he led her to Jesus to be her Lord.

In recounting this story the man exuded such joy that I marveled. How could he completely forgive that abandonment? Look at the pain she caused him! But there he was, a beaming testimony of what forgiveness can do.

Ultimately, forgiveness is for our benefit and not for the well being of the one we are forgiving. Being wounded diminishes life, makes us sad, depressed, unable to function and leaves no room for the joy and love of God. But in Christ we have freedom to enjoy our lives and to enjoy Him so He makes it imperative that we forgive.

Matt 6:14, 15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

When you are free from your own unforgivenesses, you can leave childhood and go on to the next stage of development. Unforgiveness has already been forgiven; why drag it around any longer? If you drag it around, then the forgiveness of God cannot sweep you clean. Forgiveness is the broom the Lord uses to clean out your house.

A year after being born again, I attended a Christian family camp with my children and my aunt. The Lord woke me up my first night in camp and instructed me to get my notebook and pen, which I did. Using a flashlight so as not to wake the others in the cabin, I sat, pen poised for great words from my Father God!

He said, "Write down the names of all the people you need to forgive."

I thought that to be an easy assignment; surely there would be no more than five and I began to write. With each name I put on paper, another name popped into my head. I wrote all night and finally finished at noon the next day. There were over 1000 names on my list!

Then He told me I must forgive them all. At first I thought He meant to go find them and forgive them, but no, He said I must simply forgive until the unforgiveness left me. So I took each name, individually, and said out loud, but to myself, "I forgive _____."

Just saying the words didn't do it for me. I discovered the emotion from the past incident was still bottled up in my soul and it was from the middle of that unresolved conflict that I had to say, "I forgive _____," and have it be real. Invariably, tears would flow. Not buckets of them, but an emotional release occurred as I let go of the unforgiveness.

I'll give you a simple example. One of the 1000 names was Mrs. Cantrell, my third grade teacher, whom I adored. The school held a clothes drive to aid needy families and my mother gave me one of her dresses to put in the box. Mrs. Cantrell pulled out each item to show the class, complimenting the students on their giving spirit, and said something like, "Oh, isn't this a pretty blouse?" or "What a handsome shirt!" But when she pulled my dress out she looked at it for what seemed like an hour and without saying a word put it back in the box.

I felt betrayed by this teacher whom I thought to be the most gentle, loving, beautiful woman ever to enter my life. I had to remember what it felt like, sitting in class, and forgive her from that position of humiliation. You are probably saying, "What a stupid thing to hold in your soul as an unforgiveness!" And you are right. I don't know why sometimes we make good choices and sometimes we make bad choices. Why do some things hurt us and other things don't? I haven't a clue. But I do know that these

stupid choices to be wounded stay with us until we make another choice, until we choose to forgive.

It took me the whole week of Family Camp to work my way through my list of 1000 names. But when I finished I felt GOOD! I felt clean inside! I knew what the Bible meant when it talks about Joy Unspeakable! That's what was in me, JOY!

The second aspect of spiritual childhood is:

DADDY-GOD

2. You have known the Father.

What Jesus did by His death, burial and resurrection was to reconnect us to our Father, God. This was His reason for coming to the earth. God's creation had been ripped from His hands by the disobedience of Adam and Eve through their alliance with the devil, Satan. God wanted His creation taken away from His enemy and restored to Him so Jesus, God's Son, a member of the Godhead equal to His Father, placed His Deity aside and came to earth as a baby to accomplish this goal.

Jesus lived a life as a man, experiencing all the things a normal man experiences. He was beaten and crucified on a cross where He died, taking all our sins and sicknesses with Him. After defeating the devil He rose again from the dead, remained for 40 days on the earth to give final instructions and then was taken to heaven on a cloud in His body. By paying the price for our sin with His blood, Jesus made it possible for God to be reunited with man.

Col 1:19, 20 "For it pleased the Father that in Him (Jesus) all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

We were reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus, by His work on the cross. Before we made Jesus our Lord, before accepting the work that He did for us, we were enemies of God, defiant, living for ourselves, belligerent, rebellious and self-reliant. But now that we have been born-again, adopted into the family of God, we have a new Daddy, Daddy-God, and we must take the time to get to know Him.

As a child, when I got a new daddy he liked to read me stories. Daddy-God is the same; He likes to read stories to us by our reading the Bible and Him explaining it to our spirits. The stories are about Him so we get to know Him that way. Suddenly the Bible will make sense because you have the Lord on the inside of you interpreting the

Scriptures for you. Many times, before I was born-again, I tried reading the Bible and it made no sense to me whatsoever; but once I was a member of His family the Scriptures became real and rich.

As a little girl my new daddy liked for me to do things his way. He liked to exercise and he taught me how to do jumping jacks, sit-ups and push-ups. I'd never seen anything like that before but I tried it and got good at it, so much so that I became a physical education teacher when I grew up.

Daddy-God wants us to do things His way as well. He likes for us to love people and serve people and do whatever the Bible says we can do. The more we read the stories in the Bible and listen to the interpretation of them on the inside of us, the more we realize those stories were written to teach us not only who our Father is, but what He has given us in the way of power and authority.

So many stories speak of healing and eventually we realize that because the Lord lives in us, that healing power is available to us. We try to do what we read in the Bible, such as lay hands on the sick and they will recover, and discover it actually works! We start acting like Him and He, from inside of us, gets to live His life through us. He wants us to get good at what He does and become just like Jesus. When I was a baby Christian I laid hands on anyone who came near me and needed healing. They all got healed!

As a little girl my new daddy wanted me to tell him what happened in my day. He wanted to help me with my fights with the bullies in my school. Daddy-God is the same. He wants us to tell Him everything about our lives, discuss our problems with us, and as we listen to how He wants us to resolve them, we learn about His nature. We become more like Him.

In my prayer times I would see myself sitting on Daddy-God's knee and talking to Him. I could feel His comfort, even to the point of sensing His arms around me. His is an all-accepting love, at all times, in all places, in all situations.

One story I heard made this point quite succinctly! A man came out of the military, having been highly trained by the Green Berets to kill. That's not much of a job description to obtain a 9 to 5 position and during the course of his unsuccessful job-hunting the Mafia contacted him to hire him as a professional killer. When no other course seemed open to him, he accepted.

During his killing career he was sent into a private room in a restaurant to eradicate five of the members of a rival "family". He took his machine gun to do the job and just as he had killed number two and was aiming at number three he heard God call his name. The Lord said, "I have

called you from the foundations of the earth to serve Me." The man threw down his gun and fled the restaurant, leaving three men alive.

This interruption by God radically unnerved the man. Plus the Mafia, both the family he worked for and the family he tried to kill, was after him. In despair he drove into an alley, took out his revolver and put it in his mouth to commit suicide. But the gun wouldn't fire. Instead he heard the Lord say, "I love you."

With that the man threw himself down on the front seat of his car and sobbed. He gave his life to the Lord, was gloriously born again and is now in the Philippines as a missionary. This kind of love is unknown in mankind, except for those Christians who have matured to the state of "father". This is God's kind of love. Would you have said, "I love you" to such a man? I have trouble saying "I love you" to someone who cuts me off in traffic! But to know Daddy-God we must know Him as All-Loving.

Before we can leave childhood, we need to know the Father, our Daddy-God. We need to know how much He loves us, how much He cares for us, who He is, and His nature and His heart. We need to want to grow up to be just like Him!

Now that we have mastered these baby steps of leaving behind all our sins, that's right, no more guilt, no more condemnation, and knowing our Father God on a personal, intimate basis, we are ready for the next level. Yes, there is a teen-age stage in spiritual growth! Hold onto your hats!

The first lesson to get under your belt is:

SATAN IS UNDER YOUR FEET

1. You have overcome the wicked one.

The Bible says that we have an enemy, a wicked enemy, who rules the world system. We weren't aware he existed before we met Jesus because this wicked enemy ruled us, too. Where did you think man's depravity came from? But when we came out from underneath his rule and experienced the goodness of God, the wickedness in this world could be easily discerned.

**Eph 2:1, 2 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sin,
2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience."**

Let me be straight with you. This enemy hates you because he hates God and you are now the house God lives in!

For the rest of your natural life this enemy is going to try to bushwhack you! He had you in a defeated state before you became a champion in Christ and he wants to return you to that defeated state. If he can kill you he will do it! Don't ever think he has left you alone and won't bother you again. He will.

However, our great God, our good Daddy, gave us authority over our enemy. Jesus, when He died and entered hell, defeated the devil, whipped him and made a laughing stock of him.

Col 2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Because Jesus now lives in us, that victory is ours. Satan has no right to you. Until Jesus comes back, your enemy will try to deceive you and recapture you, but he doesn't have the right to do it. Therefore, you can stand strong against the devil in your place of authority in Christ. Jesus has given us weapons to overcome him and when we learn how to use our weapons we will overcome our enemy. Studying these verses will give you a good appreciation of the tactics Satan uses.

2 Cor 10:4-6 "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

The greatest tactic of the enemy is the lie. He, speaking in the air around your head, lies to you. Jesus called Satan the father of lies. Satan argues with you about God and he puffs himself up contradicting all the knowledge you have gained about your Father. He tries his best to deceive you because unless you are deceived he has no power over you.

He sends thoughts! You are what you think. Entertaining the thoughts of Satan will eventually lead you to act on them. If you follow the thoughts of Satan you will be in disobedience and if you are in disobedience you are outside the protection of God. Satan especially likes to bring disobedient thoughts right after a spiritual victory.

Your first line of defense with the devil is to say NO. If you entertain his thoughts they become like a fortress and then it is difficult to tear down the stronghold. Because I was born into an impoverished family Satan has been able to bring thoughts to encourage me to fear poverty, even though the Bible promises prosperity.

A typical scene goes like this:

"Father," I say, "I have a bill to pay and I don't have the money. What should I do? Will You please help me?"

Satan says, pretending to be me thinking, "Well, He helped you last time, but this time you should have known better. You should have been more responsible..."

I could respond, sinking my head into my hands, "Oh, I know. Maybe I should go back to the States and get a real job. One that pays a salary. I should have made sensible investments and prepared for my future..."

Or I could pull down that stronghold and say, "I know my God. It is His good pleasure to give me the kingdom. He will take care of all my needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

When I first arrived on the mission field I came as a spiritual teen-ager. I had no health insurance and a melanoma cancer appeared on my hand; a mole, which I'd had since childhood, started to grow. For a long time I ignored it and Satan whispered in my ear.

"You're gonna die."

"You're gonna have to leave the mission field and not accomplish what God called you to do."

"You're gonna use up all the financial resources of your family because you don't have any health insurance."

When the mole got to be the size of a dime and was looking quite nasty, I said to myself, "Okay, Marty, it's time to overcome the enemy."

I pulled out my Bible and looked up all the Scriptures I knew that spoke of my healing. Scriptures like:

Mathew 8:17

1 Peter 2:24

Exodus 25:26

Psalm 103: 2, 3

I quoted those Scriptures to the cancer and then said, "I curse you and command you to get off my body in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth!"

Every day after that when I woke up, I looked at it and said, "Thank God, you're gone!" And on the fifth day when I woke up, it was gone, the mole, the cancer, everything. I had overcome the enemy.

Our weapons are not carnal but they are mighty. We have the Word of God, all the Scriptures, to use against the enemy because God's Word contains His life and power. God's Word is alive with the Life of God. We have the blood of Jesus that we can plead over the situation like a lawyer pleads a case. We can simply say, "I plead the blood of Jesus over (and then name what you want the blood to cover.)" We have the name of Jesus.

Phil 2:9, 10 "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..."

When Satan first hit me with a cruel blow in my early spiritual teen-age years, when the Lord was teaching me to learn how to overcome him, I thought I would never get off the floor again. I had been living in a babyhood cocoon, out playing on the sidewalk, so to speak, and the big bully in the neighborhood came by and slugged me!

Well, I learned how to fight back! I took that name, the wonderful name of Jesus, and clubbed Satan with it! He ran off squealing like a stuck pig. He would send "Sickness" and "Disease" and I attacked them with the Word of God about healing! They ran off defeated! He sent "Poverty" and I spoke out the Scriptures on prosperity and became rich! I had my sword out and wielded it like a fencing expert!

I felt like a gladiator until Satan started sending more deceptive forces like "Pride", "Justified Anger", "Sorrow" and "What about my rights!". Then I had to really dig into the Word to find my weapons, and often just cry out to God, "Show me the truth! Teach me Your humility!"

God has made it available for you to overcome the devil and He expects you to do it. It's part of growing up spiritually. In the process of learning to overcome the enemy you will learn the second step in being a spiritual teenager, which is:

I AM WEAK

2. You are strong.

Well, obviously I have written a contradiction here, haven't I? No, to the contrary, your strength depends on your weakness. In the natural a teenager feels indestructible. He'll try anything. I did things as a teenager I wouldn't dream of doing now because I thought nothing could harm me. One night, at midnight, some friends and I swam across Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis because we wanted to get to the other side and didn't want to walk! In

the winter I drove my mother's heavy old Chrysler on the ice to do wheelies. Would I do those things now? Never!

In the spirit a teenager learns that the power belongs to God and the less self-reliant we are the more God can wield His power. The teenager, after agonizing trial and error, finally learns to stop trying to fix things himself and let God fix them. We become strong with our weapons, The Word, The Blood, The Name, and we let God work. We learn our only power is in our words: proclaiming The Word, pleading The Blood, applying The Name.

When I reached the gladiator stage of overcoming the enemy I thought it was me doing the work, that it was MY faith, MY proclamation and MY stand against the devil that overcame him. Oh, how patiently God taught me that it is His Word, His Blood and His Name that establish my victory. Circumstances would arise and I would rise to the challenge, "I can fix that!" In the end all would lay in ashes at my feet having been destroyed by my efforts and the Lord would say, "Child, if you will let Me take care of things, I will do it."

Paul gives a good example of this from his own life. He put it in plain words for us in 2 Corinthians 12:10, **"For when I am weak, then I am strong."** He had just explained in chapter 11 how Satan attacked him bringing such forces against him that if Paul had relied on his own strength he could not have lived. Paul wanted God to intervene for him and make Satan stop it! But God's answer was in verse 9, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore Paul began declaring his own weaknesses while proclaiming God would be strong for him.

A spiritual teen-ager learns not to rely on himself but to put all his trust in God. That is how he becomes strong. He lets God be strong for him. Circumstances are not defeated by our puffed up sense of self. Nor are they defeated by the arrogance that tries to attach itself to our discovery of who we are in Christ.

In fact, circumstances are strong phenomena. The very same circumstances can either act as a weapon against the enemy or a weapon against us. Learning how to depend on God's strength turns our circumstances into weapons that win the victory, every time.

Paul says in Phil 1:12, **"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel."**

In the time of Paul the earth was still covered with thick forests. When an army went to war, a team of woodcutters had to go before the army to cut down the trees so the army could advance in regulated order, as a body.

The word "furtherance" in the Scripture verse Phil 1:12 is the Greek word used to refer to a company of woodcutters.

Imagine your body as being the Roman army. You have an objective to accomplish. Perhaps your objective is healing, or prosperity, or moving to a new city, or getting your entire family born-again, or - whatever you can name! But between you and your objective are many obstacles, namely the forest. Your circumstances may be a sickness, poverty, no job in the new city, resistance from your family members - or whatever. Where your strength lies will determine whether or not you achieve your objective.

If you try to fix things yourself, running from doctor to doctor, trying treatment after treatment, maybe even self-treatment, or investing here, changing jobs there, trying self-help projects, or packing up the family and moving without their consent, going without procuring a job first or finding a place to live before you arrive, or threatening your family with the prospects of hell, throwing Scriptures at them, walking away from them till they come to their senses, or whatever, your circumstances will turn on you and defeat you.

If you rely on God, using His Name, His Blood, His Word, and trust the power therein to work on your behalf, being patient to wait for Him to arrange things, acknowledging your weakness and His strength, the circumstances will cut down the obstacles and you will walk freely to your objective.

That doesn't make sense in the natural, but we are dealing with a supernatural God. He is strong. We are weak. We are only strong in Him when we trust in Him to use His strength for us. Getting through the teen-age years, spiritually, means learning to trust God. The more dependent we are on Him, the stronger we are.

What can we trust Him to do? Whatever we find in His Word. That's why the third step in going through the teen-age years is:

POKE ME AND THE WORD COMES OUT

3. The Word of God abides in you.

Once I was asked to speak several times at a Missionary Training Center and therefore stayed several days. About halfway through my visit the cook pulled me into the kitchen and closed the door. She started sobbing and said, "You've got to help me. You've just got to help me."

Genuinely concerned I sat her in a chair, got her a glass of water, calmed her down and asked what I could do to help her. She said, "As hard as I try, I cannot go without deodorant."

I asked innocently, "Why would you want to go without deodorant?"

She answered me in a tone of voice that indicated I was a complete idiot. "If my faith were strong I wouldn't be using deodorant."

It was all I could do to keep from laughing! I asked her where she had heard that and she said one of the students told her that real faith doesn't need anything of this world but relies only on God for everything and therefore doesn't use alarm clocks or deodorant or toothpaste or soap and so on.

I was surprised because I thought this kind of thinking died out in the Middle Ages. But I told her as sweetly as possible, "We can only believe God for what He says in His Word. It doesn't say anyplace in the Bible that we shouldn't use deodorant. He created sweat and the glands that do it; He's not going to take them away so that you don't need deodorant. He doesn't care if you use deodorant or not. Society cares whether or not you use deodorant. You cannot use your faith for that."

What God cares about is the quality of your life. He wants you healthy. He wants you wealthy. He wants you to be successful in His plan for you. He wants you to have a happy family. He wants you to spread the Good News to other people. The more you read His Word the more this reality establishes itself in you.

It's a good thing to memorize Scripture, but it's an even better thing to know Scripture. It takes time to get to know anything so give yourself time in the Word. His Word is spiritual food for you. His Word is actually spiritual law. It means what it says and it says what it means. It never changes. There are no situational ethics in the Word.

**Psalm 1:1-3 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful,
2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper."**

To meditate on the Word of God means to read it first, then imagine it, then to roll it around in your mind considering all it could mean, then to speak it out of your mouth, muttering it, saying it and triumphantly proclaiming it over your life. Look at what that will do for you: make you prosperous in every way!

How does the Word do that? The Bible tells us the Word is God. The Word gives such an accurate image of God that we can see Him there, know Him there and trust in Him there. For example, one night I was lying in bed reading my "Confessions", these are Scriptures that I have found to meditate on which promise the blessings that I want in my life.

I was reading 2 Corinthians 8:9, **"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."**

Suddenly Jesus stood by my bed, then He sat on the edge of it to look closely into my eyes and He said, "Marty, I want you to KNOW that verse." And then He disappeared. I took the verse apart, word-by-word, and discovered it was speaking of riches, of wealth, of gold and silver. I discovered there is a process in becoming rich. It is Jesus living in me, having given up His domain of golden streets, walls of jasper, gates of pearl to come live in my body made of dust. He, in me, as He lives His life through me, draws to Himself, the wealth and I, in Him, rest in His grace.

When the Word of God abides in you, the striving, the anguish, the manipulation, the worries will cease and the Word will be strong for you. There should be so much Word in you that when the difficulties of life or circumstances come against you and poke you, instead of reacting and defending yourself, the Word pours out of your mouth.

This brings us to the final stage of our spiritual teen-age years which is:

VICTORY

4. You have overcome the wicked one.

Now the victory is complete. You have learned how to wield your sword and use The Name, The Blood and The Word to defeat your enemy anytime he rears his ugly head. No longer is it a challenge for you, no longer does the heat of the battle swell your head, no longer do you rely on yourself because you keep the devil under your feet, constantly. You never let up on him, one poke and The Word comes out of your mouth like a sword, but your enemy's defeat is no longer the emphasis in your life. You have overcome him. And now you move into fatherhood.

There are two levels of being a father and they are both the same:

JESUS

1. You have known Him who is from the beginning.
2. You have known Him who is from the beginning.

As a baby, Daddy-God, your Father, raised you. As a teen-ager the powerful Holy Spirit trained you. Now it's time to know the One for Whom you have been prepared, Jesus, the lover of your soul, your Bridegroom.

Do you remember what it's like to fall in love? You still get your homework done, you still get your work done on the job, you manage all the little activities in your life, somehow, you don't know how, because your mind can only think of him - or her.

There is a love story with Jesus that has yet to be fully told. It's impossible to plumb the depths of His love for you and the more you love Him the more you realize He is all you have ever wanted.

Oh, to know Him! To know He never leaves, He never turns away in disgust or rejection of any form, to know He loves everything about you is to know the love you have been seeking since the day of your birth.

One Sunday night I skipped Church and went to a movie. As I approached the theater I said, "Lord, please forgive me for not going to church, I'm not going to turn around and leave, I'm going to the movie, but I feel so guilty, will you please forgive me?"

He said, "Marty, didn't you notice I am going with you?"

In His voice I noticed a certain eagerness and I asked, "Do You want to go to this movie?"

He said, "Yes."

I asked, "Why do You want to go to this movie with me? You were there when they made it; you know it inside out. Why do I detect a desire in You to go to the movie?"

He said, "Marty, I gave the writer the idea and the plot, I directed the movie, yes, I know the movie backwards and forwards, but I have never seen it through your eyes."

The joy I had in knowing that He loved me so much that He wanted to know my impressions and reactions and ideas and thoughts was inexpressible. I can hardly get any human being to listen to my opinions for more than 30 seconds and here was Jesus wanting to see an entire movie through my eyes! He didn't want to argue with me about it, or change my mind; He wanted to enjoy my experience!

He wants us to enjoy Him that much, too. The Bible says He is a jealous God and He doesn't want any other god to take His place as our Bridegroom, the One we are living for, the One who takes our breath away just at the sight of Him.

The more we know Him, the more we get lost in Him. It is hard to tell where a mature Christian ends and Jesus begins; they are so consumed with one another. Two people in love wouldn't dream of making decisions on their own without consulting the other for fear of hurting or

disappointing the one they love. To know Jesus is to want to discuss every point in your life with Him, never taking an action without His approval, because you love Him so much.

This is not a flirtation I'm talking about, it's not a matter of honor, or respect; it's a matter of complete surrender because you have met the love of your life. It's impossible to compare it with human love because His love is of such magnitude it can never be measured. And because His love is so great we won't be able to demand too much of it, we will never offend it, never bore it and never find the end of it. We will keep learning of Him, discovering facets of Him we never dreamed possible through all eternity. We have the brightest of bright futures in Him!

If you prayed the little prayer in the first pages, then welcome to the family. If not, I urge you to do so now and invite Jesus to be your Lord. You will be glad you did! He will never let you down!

"Father, please forgive my sins. Jesus, please come live in my heart. Make me into the person you want me to be. Be my Lord. Live Your life through me. Amen."

I am going to leave you with two prayers from Ephesians. Pray these prayers for yourself all the days of your life.

Eph 1:17-20 **"...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of my understanding being enlightened; that I may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward me who believes, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places..."**

Eph 3:14-19, **"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, 15 From whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That He would grant me, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,**

17 That Christ may dwell in my heart through faith;
that I, being rooted and grounded in love,
18 May be able to comprehend with all the saints what
is the width and length and depth and height -
19 To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge,
that I may be filled with all the fullness of God."