

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

UNIT I Key 2

FAITH

SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLE: For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. I John 5:4

The only people who can be helped to overcome are those who have a DESIRE to overcome. But desire by itself is not enough. Mere desire cannot be sustained when the journey seems rough and the temptations are strong. Desire will give way to surrender, and then the person with ssa/ma/tx will be back to where he/she started. There are several reasons why desire alone will not work.

One is that desire alone cannot change anything. It cannot change our attractions, thought patterns, or acquired habits. The wrong thoughts and feelings fuel one another until they build up urges that cry out for fulfillment. We want to resist and to give in at the same time. We eventually do what we regret.

Our feelings can be changed, our thought patterns can be transformed, and new patterns of action can be developed. We can become new people in Christ. God says to us, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (II Corinthians 5:17). How does this change happen?

We need FAITH! Faith transforms us. Through faith we become new. But in what do we put our faith? Our faith can never be in ourselves, our own good works, or any effort on our part. It can only be in Christ, Who made full satisfaction for our sins on the cross. We are incapable of contributing anything to our own salvation. We cannot produce faith by our own efforts; all of it has to be brought to us from outside of ourselves by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God.

If anyone feels hopelessly stuck in habitual sin, the good news is that only the Holy Spirit can bring conviction of sin through the Word, give us faith in the finished work of Jesus' death for our sins, bring us to repentance, and enable us to accept that the word of forgiveness is truly from God Himself. Once the Holy Spirit brings this faith to us, He then empowers us to change our lives. Faith based on God's mercy in Christ motivates us to act, speak, and think differently.

The thoughts we think influence the feelings we feel; believing that we have no options, and we often choose to act upon our feelings. Faith in God's mercy changes our self-will; we become increasingly willing to pursue God's agenda instead of our own. The more we overcome negative thinking and base our thoughts on the Word of God, the more our temptations weaken. The Holy Spirit frees us to be of greater service in accordance with our spiritual gifts and His call on our lives.

Temptations will still come, but we need not give in to them. The battle may be hard, but we can overcome. We have "the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). Too many times we have tried to fight off the missiles of temptations without faith. Even with faith, resisting temptations is not easy, but it is possible.

Many sincere Christians do not know how to use their faith to resist temptations. We can resist temptations more easily when we develop God-pleasing habits. As we grow in Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our habitual sins and teaches us new responses to temptations.

Developing new responses to old temptations often requires an intense struggle, because the mind must be re-wired. Time, repetition, and consistency are necessary for the mind to undergo this process. In some ways, the human mind is like a muscle; a sinful response becomes stronger every time it is repeated, and a God-pleasing response also becomes stronger every time it is repeated. If temptation is consistently resisted with the Word of God, one's mind can re-organize itself around Scripture rather than habitual ungodly

thoughts, while the Holy Spirit is building stronger faith. When people do not recognize the need to be consistent and persistent, they often give up resisting temptations and give in.

God's promise is that *ssa/ma/tx* temptations can be overcome (I Corinthians 6:9-11). The promise in verse 11, "And such WERE some of you," applies to all sinners, no matter to what shade of temptation they are enslaved. We may suffer some defeats, but the Holy Spirit through the Word calls us to repent, to believe the mercy of God has covered our sins, and to get back on track.

The mercy of God is a free gift that covers all the sins of the truly penitent. We cannot place our faith in any merits of our own; we can only place our faith in the merits of Jesus, Who made full satisfaction for all our sins. Focusing on what Jesus has done for us provides the strength and motivation to keep resisting temptations. Focusing on the cross and the Ransom paid for us gives us the power to say "NO!" in tempting situations. Faith makes us able to believe the promise in I Corinthians 10:13, which tells us that God will always provide a way of escape. Faith changes our will and motivates us to take the escape that He offers (II Corinthians 5:17).

If we fall, we need not stay down. Faith assures us that no matter how many times we fall into sin, God will forgive us and restore us when we repent. God's mercy is for habitual sinners; they are the ones who most need the assurance of God's mercy. However great our sin, Jesus is a greater Savior.

Our faith is in Jesus, Who conquered sin, death, and the power of the devil on our behalf. Without the Holy Spirit working through the Word, we cannot overcome the world's temptations or identify its lies. Jesus knows our weaknesses, our needs, and our struggles.

Ssa/ma/tx overcomers, as all sinners, can find great encouragement in Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:15-16. Jesus identifies with **all** of our temptations, no exceptions. Yet He Himself never sinned, and none of His temptations became even an impure thought. We can have

faith that He will come to our immediate rescue when we ask for His help against temptations. Because our faith is in His mercy rather than our own merits, we are not afraid to live transparently before Him.

SCRIPTURE: Write what each of these verses or passages means to you and your situation.

II Corinthians 5:17

Romans 10:17

Hebrews 11

Matthew 8:5-13

STUDY GUIDE (Feel free to write on the backside or use additional paper if necessary.)

1. What does God want us to believe (I John 3:23 & John 20:31)?

2. How do you get faith (Romans 10:17)?

3. What important truths do you learn from Ephesians 2:8-9?
4. Whose help do you need in order to believe in Jesus (I Corinthians 12:3)?
5. What do you learn about faith from Matthew 14:28-31?
6. How long have you been a Christian?
7. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rank the strength of your faith (1 is the lowest, 10 is the highest)? Please explain your answer.
8. Faith means focusing on Christ and what He has done on our behalf. How have you been using your faith in your battle against ssa/ma/tx?
9. What truth do you find hardest to believe?

10. Faith results in love for God. How does true love for Jesus show itself (John 14:15 & 23)?

11. What new things have you learned about faith?

12. On a scale of 1-10, how victorious have you been lately? Please explain your answer. (Victory is measured by how much you have overcome temptation.)

13. Have you begun to find verses to memorize in order to combat temptation? How is that going?

14. How is your spiritual life in general, how are your private devotions, and how are things at your church/fellowship group?

Plan of Action: (Read the handout Plan of Action and make plans as specific as possible.)