

Sermons by Joel Osteen

CHRIST & SALVATION

WHAT THE RESURRECTION MEANS TO US AS BELIEVERS

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CHRIST & SALVATION

"WHAT THE RESURRECTION MEANS TO US AS BELIEVERS"

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DODIE: We are so glad you've joined us today and we know our television program is going to be a blessing to you. Our son Joel will be preaching to you in a few moments. But I want to read this scripture. It's in First John 3 and it will make you stop and think. "The person who has been born into God's family does not make a practice of sinning because now God's life is in him, so he can't keep on sinning." Have you been in God's family but you've been sinning? You can't do it any more because it will hurt you and you know you're guilty and you'll be miserable while you're doing it. Because this new life has been born into him and it controls him. He has been born again. Aren't you glad after you get born again you can't keep on sinning because the life of the Lord Jesus lives in you. So I want to just admonish you today and encourage you. If you've been sinning, if you've been away from God, let this be the day that you come back because there's no life worth living without Jesus. Amen. (Applause)

JOEL: Well as I say often, I'm always honored to have the opportunity to share with you. 3 or 4 months ago I never dreamed I'd be up here on Easter Sunday. I've been in the background for so many years and I've got to tell you, that's a little bit less nerve-racking being back there. But I'm just glad to be here. I'm sure some of you visitors are wondering what this young kid's going to say to you today. And I want to tell you I'm wondering the same thing. (Laughter)

?My mother has a real way of encouraging me. I've got to tell you this quick story. A couple of weeks ago on a Sunday night before service she asked me, she said, "Joel, are you going to be ready to preach Easter Sunday morning?" And it's a funny question because I had spoken several Sunday mornings before. And I said, "Well, unless you know something that I don't know, I'm going to be ready." And I said, "Why do you ask?" And she said, "Well, I just wanted to let you know there's going to be a lot of people there." (Laughter) Yea, this is really helping my nerves. She said, "There's going to be a lot of visitors and you're going to have to say something about Easter." I said, "No kidding, momma?" I'm 36 years old and she's as bad as my dad. (Laughter) But you know I told my mother, I said, "Momma, this morning there were 7 or 8 thousand people there. The Lord let's you reach a level. You can only get so nervous, you know. It doesn't matter if there's 7 thousand or 7 hundred thousand. I've reached that point." And I told her, "The Lord only let's you get so nervous. My heart can only beat so fast, and I can only go to the bathroom so many times before I come out here." (Laughter) (Applause)

?But I've gotten a lot better. I'm not near as nervous. Forgive me Lord for lying. (Laughter) I am just as nervous. I saw Dr. Cherry and I thought I ought to ask Dr. Cherry, "My heart beats so fast, it's just like I'm doing aerobics up here. I shouldn't have to work out." I'm just thrilled to be up here. And I promised my mom I'd say something about Easter. So before I forget I want to tell you that the Easter Bunny's going to be in the front lobby after church. (Laughter) I love to kid my mom. I don't know why but I get great enjoyment from doing it. (Laughter) I think it's the same thing my dad did. But I don't know. Anyway it's kind of funny.

?You know we miss my dad. And all of you, of course, know my dad's not here and some of you still write on television and say, "Where's Pastor Osteen?" Well you know January 23rd he went on to be with the Lord. But thank God for the life he lived. And I certainly honor his legacy and what he did for people and you know...I can't talk about him without getting emotional. So I'm not going to talk about him. But it's the first Easter that he's not here and we honor the life that he lived. (Applause)

?What a tremendous foundation that he built this church on. You can remain standing. We're going to hold up our Bibles. Remain standing. He built the church on such a tremendous foundation you know. It's so wonderful. It's built on the foundation of the Word of God and the love of God for people. And that's just—one chapter's finished, the chapter of daddy's life, but you know it's a new chapter. And I'm excited about the future. God's a progressive God. He does new things. And you know He's got a bright future for all of you individually. And I believe He's got a bright future for this church. You know, you look up and you see it filled today and it's exciting to see what God's going to do. You know all through the Bible when a great leader died, God raised up other leaders. And most of the time when the leaders died, the Church got stronger. The Church grew even more because the people were more committed and dedicated. And even when Jesus was crucified and died, they said, "You know Christianity is done away with." But you know what happened. It spread all over the world. So things are happening here and I'm excited about the future. And I'm so glad you're here with us this morning. And let's hold up our Bibles and we're going to make our confession. And let's make it like you mean it now.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) God bless you and you may be seated.

SERMON: I'm not going to have you turn to any particular scripture right now because I'm going to quote a lot of scriptures today. As I've said already, I'm excited about the opportunity to share with you this Easter Sunday morning. Easter is a great time in Christianity—the day that we celebrate the Resurrected Savior. Isn't that great? We're not celebrating a dead god. We've got a risen Savior. Isn't that good news? Man, I'm excited about Easter. (Applause)

So many of the other religions, they celebrate the death of their leader. But thank God we can celebrate the resurrection and the life of our founder, the Lord Jesus Christ, our precious Savior.

?And I want to talk to you a little while today about "What does the Resurrection mean to you and me as believers?" What does it mean? You know I believe the Bible is practical and is relevant for us today. What does an event that happened a couple

thousand years ago; how does it effect my life? What significance does it play in my life? So, I want to talk to you a little bit about that.

And in order to do that we need to go back a couple thousand years. Let me paint a picture for you. It's the day that Jesus was going to be crucified. Use your imagination. I can see Jesus. He's surrounded by a group of Roman soldiers. He's in the midst of those. His back is bloodied and bruised. He's just been beaten with a lead whip. And I can see one of the soldiers come up and he's so proud of this crown of thorns that he just made: thick, long, two or three inch thorns. And he goes over there and he places it on Jesus' head. And he thrust it down. And you can feel the pain shoot through Jesus' body. And the sweat that's on His brow now becomes intermingled with the blood that's running down His face. And one of the Roman soldiers rips Jesus' clothes off Him. All He's got on is His loincloth. And they place on Him a purple robe, a robe signifying dignity. It's what the highest-ranking Roman officers wore. And they did this in order to make fun of Him. They wanted to insult Him, to mock Him, to make light of Him. And that's what they did. They placed Him in the circle. And they began to bow down in mockery. And they began to say, "Long live the King," and you know "Good health to the King." All mocking our Savior, our Lord and Jesus, a man who had done no wrong.

Sometimes to understand what the Resurrection means we need to see what Jesus went through and how He suffered the shame He bore for all of us. And at one point there, the mockery turned to violence. They took the purple robe off of Him and one translation talks about them blindfolding Him and punching Him with their fists and saying, "Prophecy to us now mister Messiah? Who hit you?"

See, don't think for a minute He didn't feel the pain. Don't think for a minute. He was human. He had emotions just like you and I do. But what a tremendous example He set for all of us. Don't you know, at one moment He could have called a legion of angels down there to wipe out all those around Him? But He didn't. He was so determined. He wanted to do His Father's will. He wanted to do what God had called Him to do. He willingly gave His life for us. He said at one point, "Father, this cup that I'm about to bear, it's so heavy; can You take it from me?" He said, "Nevertheless, not my will be done; but Thine be done."

And you know what happened on that Friday before Resurrection Sunday? They took Him up to the cross. One account says around noon that day and they nailed His hands into the cross. Have you ever thought about a spike going through your hand? Spikes going through your feet? I mean this is real pain, real suffering, real sorrow, and real heartache that the Lord suffered on our behalf.

And it's amazing to me because Jesus was crucified between two sinners. And in Jesus' darkest hour He was still reaching out, sharing His love and compassion. You know before it was over He had forgiven one of them their sins. In His darkest hour, He was still giving.

And the Bible says the sun refused to shine that day when they nailed Him to the cross. A little while later He cried out with a loud voice, He said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" He was forsaken so that you and I wouldn't have to be forsaken. He was paying the price for the sins of the world.

The Bible says, "All of us like sheep have gone astray." We've all done our own thing. But God laid on Him the iniquity or the sins of every one of us. He was bearing the sins of the world.

You know a little later, I think one account says around three that afternoon, He lifted up His eyes toward heaven. And He said, "Father, into your hands do I commit my spirit." And the Son of God died. Laid down His head and died right there on the cross.

And so many interesting things happened when Jesus died. One, the Bible says there was a great earthquake. The very earth that Jesus spoke into existence revolted when it lost the One who created it. The very earth shook. And the Roman soldiers, this time they changed their story a little bit. They said, "Man, maybe He was the Son of God."

But listen. Matthew 27:51 says that the very moment that Jesus died, the curtain in the temple that surrounded the presence of God was ripped in two from the top to the bottom. Now listen to this carefully because it's very significant. Back in those days, God didn't live in people like He does now. He lived in buildings. For a while, He lived in the Ark of the Covenant. But at this particular time, the people had built for Him a temple. And God lived in a sacred secluded area of the temple called the Holy of Holies.

Now listen carefully. The Holy of Holies was surrounded by a curtain, a six-inch curtain. One translation calls it a veil. But it's interesting what happened there. That's where the presence of God was. Nobody could get close to that. None whatsoever. Once a year the priest would go in to ask forgiveness for the sins of the people. He'd do it once a year and God would atone their sins or cover their sins for the whole year. And it was a very critical ceremony that they went through. The priest would have to purify himself. He'd have to wear a special robe. And he'd even have a rope on him that when he walked in that if something happened when he went into the Holy of Holies-- nobody would dare go in there, you could be killed in an instant--they'd have to pull him out if the sacrifice wasn't pleasing. So the priest would take this sacrifice into that Holy of Holies, the place where God actually lived.

And what's significant about when Jesus bowed his head and died, at that very moment the veil of the temple, that curtain that enclosed the presence of God, it was ripped in two signifying that at that point God moved out of temples made by man and He moved into the hearts and lives of every one of His believers. Isn't that good news? (Applause)

See, that's the good news of the Resurrection. I mean that's one of the things that God lives in us. We are the address of God. The Bible says, "What, know ye not that your bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost?" See, there's no more holy buildings. As much as this building is sacred in one sense; there's no more holy buildings. God lives in the hearts and lives of His people. But you've got to understand there still had to be a sacrifice. There still had to be a blood sacrifice.

So what was happening here? Well, in the book of John, John gives the account of Jesus when He just arose from the dead. And it's in John, chapter 20. You don't need to turn to it. Let me just tell you. Mary Magdalene was at the Garden tomb and she was sobbing. She's looking in there and she can't find the body of Jesus. And Jesus

has appeared to her, behind her. Jesus says, "Woman, why are you weeping?" And she thought He was the gardener. She said, "Sir, if you've taken away His body, please tell me where and I'll go get Him?" And Jesus said, "Mary." No doubt she recognized Jesus' voice at that point. And she turned around and she said, "Rabbi, Teacher, Master." And no doubt she was going to hug Him or to grab Him. Maybe to embrace Him. In John 20:17, He said something that's very significant also. He said, "Mary, touch me not. I have not yet ascended unto my Father and to your Father; unto your God and to my God." See, there still had to be a blood sacrifice. And Jesus had shed His blood. And He had His holy blood on Him at that point. He had the precious blood of Jesus on Him. And it's interesting because later when Jesus appeared to the disciples, He openly told them. He said, "Touch me, feel me, handle me." You know the story. He told doubting Thomas, "Feel the nail scars in my hand."

Why did He tell Mary, "Don't touch me"? Well, the reason He did is He had just arisen from the dead. He had the blood, the precious blood, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world on Him. And what He was saying, He said, "Mary, I'm about to go." And the Bible talks about in Hebrews how He went—He didn't go to the Holy of Holies this time because God moved out of that. He went into the very heavens themselves and He placed His blood as a sacrifice for our sins in the high court of heaven. And He offered it to God. And the good news about Easter is that God accepted the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ. (Applause)

See, see, no more do we have sin hanging on to us and pulling us down into the depths of hell. The price has already been paid. See, that's the beauty of the resurrection. That's why I can stand up here with good news and smile at you and preach with enthusiasm. Because you know our sins have already been forgiven. The Bible talks in Hebrews about how He went up there to obtain an eternal redemption for our sins. Think about that. We don't have to go and get them redeemed once a year anymore. Jesus paid the price forever. One translation says He gives us an eternal release from our sins. See, that's good news folks. Past, present, and future—the debt has already been paid. No wonder John the Baptist looked at Him at one point and said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."

You see back in the old covenant, the sins were only covered. Atonement means "to cover." And when you cover something, you know there's still a memory of it. You can still see something there. But folks we live in a better covenant built on better promises when Jesus died and purchased our redemption. Our sins aren't covered, they're totally and completely washed away. Isn't that good news? (Applause)

One translation says that they're totally eradicated, totally erased. One of my favorite versions says that when Jesus died, He cleared our record. How many of you have had some things you've done in the past you're not real proud of? Well, listen, when you come to God, He clears your record. If the past is bothering you, if people are bringing up things in your past, or thoughts in your life, listen, you've got to remember that Jesus has cleared your record. You cast that down. That is not God bringing up the past, that's the enemy. And it's up to us to cast it down. Jesus paid all the price.

And some of you today don't want to come to God because you say, "Joel, you know, you're talking about some things I don't understand." Listen, this is what you need to understand. Your sins have already been forgiven if you will only accept the gift. The price has already been paid.

Some of you say, "Well, Joel, I've done too much in the past and I don't live the right kind of life. You know when I clean myself up, I'll come to God." But that's not the way it works. You come to God just as you are. Give Him yourself just as you are. He says when you come to Him, He will make you a new creature. And what happens is none of us are where we want to be. You know God's working on all of us. You come to God just like you are and He'll start to mold you into that person that He wants you to be. Don't ever let that stop you from coming to God.

And Jesus at the Garden tomb, He told Mary there, "Mary, don't touch me," He said, "But go tell My disciples." And you know Jesus commands all of us. The resurrection means to me that our sins are forgiven. And the resurrection means to me that I should go out and tell this good news. It's too good to keep to ourselves. You know that? It's too good to keep to ourselves. Jesus commissions us to, you know, go out and make disciples. Tell the good news. Well what's the good news? The good news is that the sins of the world have been forgiven. The debt has been paid in full. And that you can be washed in the precious blood of the Lamb.

Listen folks, most of you here are born again Christians. But what I want to say to you is this is when you share your faith, don't talk about the preacher, don't talk about the church, talk about the fact that their sins have already been forgiven. That's the good news. Listen; don't dangle people over the fires of hell. Lisa and I always kid about you know we're going to dangle them over the fires of hell. Listen, that doesn't draw people to God. They know what kind of life they live. They know how bad they've lived. What you've got to do is talk about the goodness of God. Listen, it's the goodness of God that brings people to repentance. It's the goodness of God.

One thing I always appreciated about my dad is that he instilled into us a good vision of who God was. We learned about a good God.

And then the other thing that the resurrection means to me is it gives us the hope of heaven. Thank God this world is not all. Do you all ever think about heaven? Heaven's hard for our finite minds to understand. It's hard for us to comprehend in one sense. But heaven is a real place. It's a place of indescribable beauty. And you know it's almost hard to describe it.

Victoria and I were at the Galleria the other day, her home away from home. (Laughter) She lives part time at our house and part time at the mall. I'm sure the men can understand. We were up there late at night and the mall was all decorated for Easter. And there were a couple of areas of flowers. Maybe about as big as this platform. Yea, probably about as big as this platform. And nobody was at the mall that night. It was late and they'd just put these beautiful flowers out. And man, we walked through it and you could see the marvelous creation God made. And you started to--you could just sense the presence of God. When you looked at each flower so individually and meticulously made, you just thought this is magnificent. And the beautiful smell that was there, the aroma. That just made me think about heaven.

And it reminded me of an account somebody gave about heaven. And they talked about the magnificent flowers in heaven. Think about heaven now folks. They make streets out of gold. They talk about all the food up there.

Somebody was kidding the other day: there's not going to be any low fat food in heaven. Thank God. I heard somebody kidding about. Let me think if I can remember how it went. It was about this guy who went to heaven. Let me see if I can get it right. He went to heaven and he said, "Where's the low fat line?" And they said, "There's no low fat food in there." He got real angry. And they said, "Why are you so angry?" He said, "Well I'm angry because if my wife hadn't had me eating all that stuff, I'd been up here a long time ago." (Laughter) You know what he means, huh? We're going to this great place and we try to prolong our lives here.

But you know he was talking about the flowers in heaven and how beautiful. And he talked about this sweet perfume-like aroma up there. And one thing that stuck out in my mind, he said there were so many flowers that everywhere you walked you stepped on the flowers. He said, and you squashed them down; but he said it didn't matter. Because when you lifted up your leg, there was so much of the resurrection power of Jesus there, the flowers just popped back up in place. Isn't that great? (Applause)

You know there's no death; there's no decay. Nothing can die up in heaven. There's no time. We're not going to get old. We're not going to age. You know there's no suffering, no heartache, and no pain. Daddy used to always say there's not going to be any more taxes in heaven. It's worth going because of that, isn't it?

I heard somebody say the other day, you know, you've all heard this saying. There are only two things in life for certain: it's death and taxes. And they said, well at least death is still better than taxes because death doesn't get worse every time Congress meets. (Laughter)

But thank God we have the hope of heaven. We've got the hope of heaven. And you know, take this in the right sense, but in this life there's question marks. We don't have all the answers. You know we have God's word. And I know we live in an evil world, but there are things we don't understand. And I don't understand it all. And I know daddy didn't understand it all. We don't understand how—You know I don't understand when I watch the war how these little kids are involved, you know, at no fault of their own. I don't understand sometimes about a little baby being born addicted to crack cocaine at no fault of her own. You know sometimes we look at life and we say you know it's not fair. It's not fair sometimes when a parent may be taken out of a life early and nobody to raise the little kids.

But you know the resurrection of Jesus says to me that in the big picture of life Jesus stands there with His arms held open wide. And on the horizon of life He says, "Look, don't worry about this life. I know you don't understand everything." He says this, He says, "Endure hardships, fight the good fight of faith, put your trust and confidence in me. But know that you're going to come to a place where there's not going to be any more tragedy, there's not going to be any more pain, there's not going to be any more suffering. You're not going to have any more questions when you come up there with me." (Applause)

Think of the hope that we have because of Easter Sunday morning. Isn't that good news?

You know I can't wait to get up to heaven to see my dad. You know, I can't wait to tell him that, "Hey daddy, I got up there and preached more than one time." You

know daddy was always trying to get me up here. Through the years he said, "Joel, they want to hear you." And I'd always say, "Daddy, as long as you're here, you're the preacher. They're coming to hear you." And you know I did the television production, like my mom said, for 16 years. And I used to say, "Daddy, you preach and I'll make you look good. I promise you that." And daddy loved that. He loved to look good. And we'd be out in public sometimes. And he'd introduce me. He'd say, "This is my son Joel. He does my television production." He'd smile real big and say, "He makes me look good."

I was thinking about the other day--I saw some of these kids this morning. They came in, in those big baggy pants that they wear. And sometimes we think you know what are they doing wearing this stuff? But you remember my dad? When he was only 17 he wore those pants up to here. It was the same thing. You know the styles come around and go around. But they were those big, big baggy pants. And they came down to bootleg, you know, I mean to a tight leg. And he was telling me a couple weeks before he died--he was just reminiscing. He was talking about he used to wear that hat and he had his coat on. It was called a zoot suit. I think I still have the chain. Or momma has that chain. And he used to put his chain right there and he pulled that coat back. Man, he was a cool cat. And he'd wind up. (Laughter) He used to tell me how he'd do that. So don't you ever give up hope on these young people. (Applause) These cloths are just ah...

I'm going to tell you one more funny story about daddy and then I'll quit. But daddy, he loved to get--In his later years, he didn't have a whole lot of hair. And I can say this now that he's gone, otherwise, I'd be dead. He didn't have a whole lot of hair. Victoria, my wife, fixed his hair. And she used to fix it just right. Man she could curve it right over. And then she'd get a couple cans of hair spray and spray it you know. And he'd come out here and he'd be so proud of that hair. I'm talking about when we get to heaven we can reminisce. Don't you all tell him I told this.

But I'll never forget one day he came up to the platform. He'd just had his hair done and we had a visiting minister. And they were going to pray over daddy. And this guy was going to lay his hands on daddy's head. And I'll never forget that hand came up and here comes daddy's hand--like right there. (Laughter)

Daddy was bold. He didn't mind doing anything. You should see the things he'd do in public sometimes. He would embarrass us. But I'll never forget that.

One time--I got to tell you this one last story. I told you one. (Laughter) But you all egg me on. You all are so easy to talk to. I'll tell you one more. We're supposed to be talking about Easter, but somehow this will tie in.

One time we were down in the Amazon jungles, just me and him. And he'll kill me if he knows I told this. But we were there by the water and we were waiting for a boat to come pick us up. And I was probably about 20. There was this other guy that was there and he spoke Spanish. He was about my age. And he had this little bitty--it was like a monkey, I guess it was a monkey. It looked just like a monkey. But it was only about that big. And this guy had it on his T-shirt. And he was just his pet. And he was running all over his shirt like, you know, just having fun. And we were so intrigued and we stopped and looked. Daddy, you know, he was bold. He said, "Can I see him?" And the guy said, "Sure." Well, he didn't speak English but he said yes. And he let that thing come on to daddy's shirt and that thing just ran all over

daddy's shirt and we were having a lot of fun just watching it. But what daddy didn't realize is daddy had a shirt with buttons on the front. He didn't have a shirt like a T-shirt. And before you knew it, that monkey got inside his shirt. (Laughter) And it was the funniest thing because that started tickling him because he was running around. And daddy was going like this--back and forth. I thought daddy had a little bit of rhythm there for a minute. (Laughter)

But, you got to hear the rest of it. It's funnier than that. So that guy comes over and he reaches in there and is trying to get it out of there. He got his hand in daddy's shirt and man by this time I've walked way away. I didn't want to—I saw some people looking. But they couldn't get it out. And finally that little monkey came out the back of his neck. And when he hit daddy's hair, I think he thought it was some straw or some hay or something. He went wild in daddy's hair. It took us forever to get out. And you got to know my dad, how he didn't like to have his hair messed up. But when he got through, daddy looked like a mad scientist or something. (Laughter) You know daddy's hair was real long because he wore it back. And man, he looked like Don King maybe. (Laughter)

All right, I got to quit. We're supposed to be talking about Easter, about the resurrection. No listen. I can't wait to get up there and reminisce. We've got the hope of going to see our loved ones. How many of you have loved ones there up in heaven? See, all of us do.

And thank God for the good news about Easter. Let me wrap it up for just one second. The good news about Easter is this is that God has already paid the price. He's already suffered. He's already borne the sins of the whole world. All we have to do is accept His forgiveness. Some people say, "You know Joel, you're giving people a license to sin when you say that." No listen. When you really know God, you don't want to sin. You don't want to sin. You want to please God. And what the resurrection of Jesus means to me is that my sins have already been forgiven, that I have good news to tell the world, that I want to live a holy, godly life. And that I have the hope of one day I'm going to heaven to spend eternity up there with all those who have gone before me. That's the good news of the resurrection. That's the good news of the resurrection.

Well, let's bow our heads in prayer. I want to say one thing to those of you who are viewing by television. Some of you maybe have never accepted Jesus. Maybe you've never asked Him to come into your heart. You know, it's a tragedy to die when God's already paid the price. When He's already borne your sins and sickness. You just have to accept this gift. And I want you to just pray a simple prayer with me. Maybe you don't know how to pray. But all you got to do is say this prayer and mean it with your heart. Say, Jesus, come into my heart. Save me. Be my Lord. Be my Savior. Jesus, I want to serve You all the days of my life. I'm not everything I want to be Jesus, but I know You'll make me into what You want me to be. Jesus, I'll serve You all the days. I'll give you 100%.

Well, I believe you prayed that prayer. And listen, what you ought to do is if you can, come out here to Lakewood and be with us. We'd love to have you. If not, go to a good church in your neighborhood or in your area and support that pastor. Support that church in your attendance and your giving. Never regret giving your life to God. I hope you'll join us again next week.

"THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #CS_002 - 4-23-00

OPENING: The only thing that matters starts today! At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. Join us this Sunday. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!(Applause)

DODIE: Praise the Lord! We welcome you today. We're so glad you joined us by television. Let me read you a scripture. It's my favorite scripture-or one of them-they're all my favorite. Everybody knows this one: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thank God. This is Easter. Jesus hasn't changed one bit and He never will. But listen to what the sentence underneath that says: So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas. Now, Jesus hasn't changed, so don't you be attracted to strange new ideas that maybe tell you that He has changed. He hasn't, he never will. So you stick to the Word of God and you can't go wrong. And all the people said Amen and Amen! (Congregation applauds)

JOEL: Well, we do welcome all of you to Lakewood Church. We're so glad to have you here. All the visitors, we just hope you feel the love and the presence of God. We know you do feel it. And we want to invite all those of you who are watching by television to come out and join us whenever you can. We feel like you're a part of our extended family. So give us the honor of meeting you in person. If you ever come through Houston. Or if you don't have a church home, we would just love to have you out here at Lakewood Church, the Oasis of Love.

I've got my family with me today. And ya'll know I'm so proud of my family. Ya'll know Victoria, here. But she's the best. She's my best friend. We've been married over 13 years. We've had the opportunity to travel all over the world together. And I just love her and respect her. Now God's given us two beautiful little children. Jonathan turned 5 this week. He's my best friend also. Ya'll give him a handclap. (Congregation applauds) Jonathan, do you want to say anything, buddy? No. Alexandra is a year and a half. Let me show you her little pretty dress. Can you wave at them, Alexandra? Okay, smile for them now. Can you smile? Okay. Give daddy a kiss. Give daddy a kiss. Oh, yeah. And of course, ya'll know Victoria. But I've got a great family. I'm proud of them. The Lord has blessed me. I'll give her one. Okay, here you go. Here stay up here Victoria. You've got to hear this e-mail.

This is from Carol in another state. One day Adam and God were talking in the Garden of Eden. And Adam said, God, why did you make Eve so beautiful. God replied, So that you would love her. Adam said, Well, God, why did You give her such beautiful blonde hair and such beautiful eyes? God replied the same thing, So you would love her. Adam said, Well, God why did you give her such a good figure and make her so attractive? Same answer. God said, So you would love her. Adam said, Okay, God, tell me this, you made her so beautiful and such a knockout. Why did you make her so dumb? God kind of laughed and said, That's easy, Adam. So that she would love you. (Congregation laughs)

Ya'll ready to study your Bibles? All right, let's hold it up and say it like you mean it. **CONFESSION:** This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am

what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. I always tell you, it's a real joy and honor for me to have the opportunity to stand up here before you and share God's Word. And today is one of my favorite Sundays of the year. It's the day we celebrate the Risen Savior. Aren't you glad our God is alive? See, all these other religions, they celebrate the death of their leader. But thank God we can celebrate the Resurrection and the Life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to talk to you a little while today about what the Resurrection means to you and me as Believers. What impact and what significance does an event that took place hundreds and hundreds of years ago have in our lives today? How does the resurrection affect you and me right now living in the year 2000?

Well, to fully understand it, we've got to go back a couple of thousand years to the events leading up to the Resurrection. And let me paint a picture for you. Use your imagination with me. It's the day that Jesus is going to be crucified. And He's surrounded by a group of Roman soldiers. His back is bloodied and bruised because He'd just been beaten with a lead whip.

And one of those soldiers comes up and proudly shows off the crown of thorns that he just made. Now these aren't little thistles like we've seen in Sunday school pictures. These are two to three inch strong thorns that are just like nails. And then with all of his might, that soldier forcefully thrusts that crown onto Jesus' head. You can feel the pain shoot through His body. And these thorns rip into the Lord's scalp and now the sweat on His brow begins to be intermingled with the blood and begins to run down His face. It is the blood of a perfectly innocent man. A man that did no wrong. But yet the world hated Him.

A man that went about doing good and healing people and comforting the oppressed and comforting the brokenhearted and even raising the dead. Yet the people chose to crucify Him. The Bible says He was the spotless, sinless Son of God.

Then all of a sudden one of those soldiers ripped Jesus clothes off of Him leaving Him standing there only in His loincloth. And they put on Him a purple robe so that they could make fun of Him and ridicule Him and humiliate Him. You see, a purple robe was a robe of dignity worn by the highest-ranking Roman officers. And they began to bow down in mockery and insult Him and say, "Long live the King". "Good health to the King". "How can we serve You better, your majesty?"

And then their mockery turns to violence. They take the robe off of Him and they blindfold Him and they begin to laugh and hit Him with their fists and say, "Prophecy

to us now, Mr. Messiah. Who hit you that time?" See, the Living Bible says that they openly hit Him with their fists in His face.

And see, if we're going to fully understand and appreciate the impact of the resurrection, then we've got to fully understand the suffering and the shame and the humiliation that Jesus went through on our behalf. He prayed, "Father, if there be any way you can take this cup from me and not cause me to go through all this heartache and pain. Father, please take it away from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." See He willingly offered His life as a sacrifice for our sins. He said, "No man takes my life. I freely lay it down of myself." And at 12 o'clock noon on that Friday-ya'll know the story. They took Him to Mount Calvary. And they drove His hands and His feet with spikes into that cross. When they did that, the Bible says, "the sun refused to shine. Darkness covered the earth."

A couple of hours later, as He hung on that Cross, Jesus cried in great agony, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" But friends, He was forsaken so that you and I would never have to be forsaken. He was paying the price for your sins and your mistakes and your failures and your shortcomings. The Bible says in 1st Peter 3:18 that "He died for our sins once for all, the Just for the unjust, the Righteous for the unrighteous, the Innocent for the guilty, so that He could make a way that we could come safely and freely to God."

Thank God. He was bearing the sins of the world. And on that same Friday, about three in the afternoon, Jesus lifted up His head toward the Heavens and He said, "Father, into Your hands do I commit my Spirit." And the Son of God bowed down His head and He breathed His final breath. And the Bible says, immediately there was thunder and there was lightening. And the earth began to tremble. And the rocks were split open. The very earth that He created revolted when it lost the One that spoke it into existence.

And when those Roman soldiers saw the events that happened, when they saw the earthquake, they were terrified. And they were filled with Holy awe. And they said, "Surely, He was the Son of God." The Bible says in Matthew 27:51, that immediately, the very moment He was crucified, the veil or the curtain that surrounded the presence of God in the temple was ripped in two from the top to the bottom."

This is very significant because in those days, God didn't live in people, like He does today. He lived in man made buildings and temples. And at this particular time, He lived in a very secluded, sacred area of the temple called the Holy of Holies. And this curtain, six-inch curtain or veil surrounded the Holy of Holies. And it kept the people away from the presence of God. Nobody could go in there. Only the High Priest. And he would only go once a year to ask forgiveness for the sins of the people.

And this was a very critical and very serious ceremony. If anything were to go wrong, he could be instantly killed. He had to purify himself. And he had to wear special clothing. And then he would take the blood of an animal as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. And he would present that sacrifice on the altar right there before the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. And, hopefully, it was acceptable and God would forgive the sins of the people for that entire year.

But see, when Jesus died, that veil that surrounded the presence of God, the Holy of Holies, it was ripped apart signifying that God wasn't there anymore. God moved out of buildings and He moved into the hearts and lives of each one of us. See, now we are the address of God.

But see there still had to be a blood sacrifice for our sins. There still had to be a price paid. But there were no more Holy of Holies. So how was this going to happen? How were we supposed to get forgiveness for our sins? What blood was going to be shed? And where was it going to be presented?

Well, in the book of John, chapter 20, there's an interesting scripture that gives us insight into this. In this whole chapter, John is describing his account of when Jesus arose from the dead and appeared to Mary Magdalene there at the Garden Tomb. Mary was weeping because she could not find the body of Jesus. And she thought somebody had stolen it. And Jesus appeared to her and said, "Woman, why are you crying?" And Mary thought He was the gardener and she said, "Sir, if you've taken away my Lord, please tell me where you put Him so I can find Him." Then Jesus said, "Mary." And at once, she immediately recognized that was the voice of the Lord. And evidently she turned around and reached up to hug him and love him and embrace him. But Jesus said something very interesting there in John 20:17. He said, "Mary, don't touch me yet, for I have not yet ascended unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God."

Now, why didn't Jesus want Mary to touch her? Later on, when He appeared to the disciples several times, He wasn't concerned about this. He sat with them and ate with them. And no doubt brushed up against them. Ya'll know the story. He even openly invited doubting Thomas to feel the nail scars in His hands. What made this event any different than the rest? I'll tell you what it was. Jesus had just risen from the grave and He still had His Holy blood on Him. It was this blood He was going to use as a sacrifice for our sins. He said, Mary, don't touch me. I've not yet gone to heaven."

See, the Bible says in Hebrews that Jesus took His own blood and He didn't go to the Holy of Holies, but He went into the very heavens itself. And He presented His own blood in the high court of heaven as a sacrifice for all of our sins, past, present, and future. And see, friends, the good news of Resurrection Sunday, the reason we can celebrate today, is because God gladly, with great joy and pleasure, He accepted the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. And now no longer do we have sin to hang on us and to drag us down to hell. The price has already been paid once and for all. Isn't that good news? (Congregation applauds)

See, and the Bible says that Jesus obtained an eternal redemption for our sins. One translation says, "an eternal release from our sins." See, friends, we don't have to be redeemed once a year anymore. We have been eternally redeemed not by the blood of bulls and goats, but by the blood--the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. See you can't get any better than that. And that's why I can get up here today with great joy and enthusiasm. Because I've got good news to tell you, you don't have to go to hell. Your sins have already been forgiven. All you've got to do is accept this forgiveness and make Jesus the Lord of your life.

Oh, you say, Joel, man, I've lived the wrong kind of life. You don't know what I've done. I've hurt a lot of people. I've done a lot of bad things. Listen, friends, there is

no sin that you've ever committed or that you will ever commit that hasn't already been forgiven. Don't let the enemy lie to you and try to tell you that you're too far-gone and God won't have anything to do with you. Listen, friends, that's a lie. The Bible says that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Not part of it but all of it.

And see, under that Old Covenant, before Jesus died, their sins were only covered. Atonement means to cover. But under this New Covenant, since Jesus has died, we have a better covenant built upon better promises. And thank God. Our sins aren't covered anymore, they are totally and completely washed away.

No wonder John the Baptist looked at Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." One translation says that "our sins have been eradicated and totally erased". My favorite version says, "God has cleared our record". And I don't know about you, but I've needed my record to be cleared quite a few times. Now, if God can only do that for Victoria's driving record.

But see I'm sure there's people here that have things that you've done in your past that you're not proud of. All of us do. Maybe you have some so-called skeletons in your closet. But listen, friends, you've got to know when you come to God and you repent of your sins, He instantly, immediately, without question, unconditionally clears your record and He says "their sins and iniquities I will remember no more forever".

And see, sometimes in life, it's hard for us to forgive ourselves of our past mistakes and failures. It's hard to let go of the past sometimes. And Satan's specialty is to bring condemnation and try to make you feel guilty and unworthy and undeserving of God's goodness and blessings. But listen friends, if God forgives you and if He doesn't remember your sins, then you're going to have to learn how to forgive yourself. And go on and get out of the past. See, if anybody keeps bringing up the past, I can guarantee you that does not come from God. And you've got to recognize where it comes from. It comes from Satan and he is the father of lies.

And today if your past is bothering you and these negative-condemning thoughts are coming against you. And trying to make you feel guilty. You've got to learn to just rise up and just cast that junk down. Don't listen to Satan's lies. Don't pay any attention to it. The Bible says, "there is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus". See when those thoughts come to your mind, you just got to be able to raise your hands and say, Father, I thank you because of what Jesus has done. I am already forgiven. And You have already cleared my record. And You don't have any memory of my sin because they have already been washed away in the blood of Jesus. So Father, I praise You with joy and I am free from guilt and condemnation. And I know that I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

See, friends, don't let your past torment you. You remind the enemy that the sacrificial blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has already been shed. It's been presented and accepted in the High Court of Heaven. And all of your sins, past, present, and future, have already been forgiven.

And see, friends, under this New Covenant, every one of us can go to God directly for ourselves. We don't need an earthly High Priest anymore. None of us need an intermediary between us and God. You don't need me to talk to God for you. You

don't need any preacher or any friend or any priest or any Pope to talk to God for you. Because of the resurrection, you can go to God directly for yourself and talk to Him one on one.

And see, I say this with all due respect and all humility. But don't let anybody deceive you into praying to some saint or praying to somebody that you think is more holy or godly or worthy than you are. Listen friends, because of what Jesus did, He made you worthy and He gave you permission to go right into the throne room of God. (Congregation applauds)

And I love and respect the Virgin Mary and Peter and Paul and all those great apostles. But I'm telling you friends, if they were standing right beside me today, they'd tell you the same thing I'm telling you. And that is, don't pray to anybody else. You go to God directly for yourself. (Congregation applauds) The Resurrection gives us the confidence and the assurance that our sins have already been forgiven and that we can go to God directly for ourselves.

And the third thing, because of all of what Jesus accomplished in the Resurrection; you and I have power and authority over the devil and demon forces. I can imagine when Jesus bowed His head and died on that cross, that Satan and all those demons they gathered in Hell for a great victory celebration. I can imagine it looked something like the victory party in the locker room after the Super Bowl. You can see them giving high five's and jumping around. Shouting with great excitement, We did it! We did it! I told you we could defeat Him! Now we're in control. Now we can do whatever we want. And can't you hear Satan laugh sarcastically and say to his demons, Aren't you glad you followed me now? Aren't you glad you revolted out of the heavens? I told you it'd be worth it.

But in the midst of that celebration, one of the demons notices a man coming from a long distance. They can't quite figure out who it is. So they begin to curiously look and try to figure out who it is because this person isn't celebrating like the rest of them. He's marching toward them with boldness and with a determination that they've never seen before. One of those demons finally recognizes who it is. And he screams in terror, Oh no, it's our worst nightmare. He's back. Here comes the Son of God. (Congregation rejoices)

Can't you see Jesus looking right into Satan's eyes and saying, "Satan, I hate to spoil your victory party, but I think you're celebrating a little bit too soon"? You may have knocked me down, but you sure didn't knock me out. And it's not over until I say it's over. Satan says, Listen, Jesus, you're on my turf now. You don't have a chance down here. You're surrounded by my demons. We're going to tear you apart. And Jesus just smiles and says, "Go ahead, Satan, make my day!" (Congregation applauds) Jesus says, "Look, Satan, I'm down here to take care of business. I'm ready to do battle. I don't want to be here any longer than I have to be because it stinks down here."

The Bible indicates that for three days, Jesus went into the very depths of hell. Right into the enemy's own territory. And He did battle with Satan face to face. Can you imagine what a show down that was? It was good vs. evil. Right vs. wrong. Holiness vs. filth. Here are the two most powerful forces in the universe have come together to do battle for the first time in history. But thank God. The Bible says, "Satan was no match for our Champion". This was no contest. (Congregation applauds)

Jesus crushed Satan's head with His foot. He bruised his head. And He once and for all, forever defeated and dethroned and demoralized our enemy. One translation says, "He paralyzed him and rendered him powerless". But thank God. He didn't even stop there. He went over and ripped the keys of death and hell out of Satan's hands. And He grabbed Satan by the nap of his neck and He began to slowly drag him down through the corridors of Hell. All beat up and bruised because He wanted to make sure that every single demon saw very clearly that Jesus was indeed the undisputed Champion of all time! Amen? (Congregation applauds)

The Bible says in Colossians 2:15 that God "disarmed the principalities and powers ranged against us and he made a bold display and a public example of Satan's defeat". Jesus did not want there to be any question or controversy whatsoever as to who the enemy was. He didn't want there to be any doubt in anybody's mind. And see friends, this was not a split decision; this was unanimous. It was Jesus everything and Satan nothing. One translation says, "Jesus brought Satan to nought". In other words, He brought Satan to zero. Satan didn't even score. This was a shut out. You can't get anymore defeated than that.

And see the good news today is that Satan is eternally defeated. There's not ever going to be anymore rematches. It is forever settled. Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And see the reason we can celebrate today is because that grave could not hold Him in. Satan did his best but his best just wasn't enough. And see they put Jesus in that tomb all bound up and wrapped up on that Friday afternoon. But thank God on Sunday morning, it was a different story. He burst out of those grave clothes and He said with a smile, "I am He that liveth and I was dead, but behold I am alive, not for a little while, not for a hundred years. I am alive forevermore and I've got the keys of death and hell." (Congregation applauds)

And the good news about the resurrection is we don't have to be afraid of the devil and demons. You're washed in the Blood of Jesus. The forces of darkness are scared to death of you. Every time they see you, do you know what they see? They see the Blood of Jesus that's all over you and they are terrified. They run. That reminds them of what Jesus did to their leader. They'll never forget that day when Jesus drug Satan down through the corridors of Hell, humiliating him and embarrassing him.

And now the Bible says if we will just submit ourselves to God, if we'll just give our lives to God, we can resist the devil and he will flee from us. And see, as a Born again Believer, none of us have any business living a life of fear and defeat and misery. Some of you today are waiting on God to help you get out of your mess. But friends, God is waiting on you to rise up and begin to exercise the authority that rightfully belongs to you. Satan is not going to get anymore defeated. He's as defeated as he can be. And see, it's an insult to our God for us to live a life of defeat and misery and whine and complain after all Jesus has gone through on our behalf. And every one of us needs to understand and fully recognize how to exercise our authority over the devil and demon forces. Don't allow Satan to defeat you. Some of you are learning to live with addictions and all kinds of pain and mental torment and all kinds of other heartache. Friends, it doesn't have to be that way. The price has already been paid. But do you know what? You've got to do your part. You've got to take control of that situation. And you've got to start resisting the devil and telling him to get out of your life in the name of Jesus.

What does the resurrection mean to you and me today living in the year 2000? Number one. Our sins have already been forgiven. Number two. We can go to God directly by ourselves, for ourselves. Number three. The devil and demon forces have been defeated and we have authority and power over them.

But listen to me carefully, friends, this is so important. None of this will do you any good unless you rise up and begin to act on it. Do you know you can still die and go to hell even though your sins have already been forgiven? What a tragedy. But if you don't accept this forgiveness and make Jesus the Lord of your life, it's not going to do you any good. And just what I said earlier, the devil's already defeated. But if you don't learn how to exercise your authority over him, he'll keep you in defeat throughout your lifetime.

So my challenge to all of you today is to stir yourselves up and begin to act on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Don't let all the pain and suffering and shame that Jesus went through on your behalf go to waste because you 're too lazy or you're too indifferent or you're too ignorant or you're just too easily deceived. No listen, you've got to be serious about your relationship to God. Come to church every time the doors open. Find out who you are in Christ. Find out what this Bible says about you.

See we all need to learn to walk in the full revelation of what God has done for us. We are new creatures in Christ Jesus. Our past record is totally and completely cleared. Now we can go to God directly for ourselves without guilt and condemnation and talk to God one on one. Satan is under our feet and we are more than conquerors because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Friends, we've got a great reason to celebrate today. We're on the winning side. Jesus Christ is still the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is still the undisputed, undefeated Champion of all time. And the best news is He's alive forevermore! And He said, "Because He lives, we can live also". Amen? Let's give Him praise. (Congregation applauds)

EVANGELISM

"THE GREAT COMMISSION"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #EV_001 - 2/20/00

OPENING: The only thing that matters starts today. The life that you've been looking for is not so far away. We believe in new beginnings, feel the strength, spread your wings! And so we'll feel the power that only love can bring. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you. We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you! (Applause)

DODIE: We're so glad you've joined us by television today. It's a tremendous blessing for us to be able to come into your homes wherever you are. Let me read you one scripture. And this may step on somebody's toes; but that's okay. Maybe it'll do you some good. Proverbs 19:27 says: "Stop listening to teaching that contradicts what you know is right." I mean that is good. If where you're going to church they don't teach you about healing; if they teach that Jesus has changed, then I'd stop listening to that teaching if you know in your heart that Jesus does heal. And He still does. I'm a miracle. I am one. I know that Jesus still heals. So stop listening to teaching and follow our heart! (Applause)

JOEL: Amen. Well we do welcome all of you to Lakewood Church. We're so glad to have all of you here. I know I tell you every week, but we love you and we just believe for God's best in your lives. And those of you watching by television, we like to give you a personal invitation to come out here and see us whenever you can. I got the opportunity to meet people today from Canada and Zimbabwe and Oklahoma and a pastor from New Jersey. People from all over the world come out here and we'll treat you right. If you live in Houston and been watching us for years, come out here and see us and give us the opportunity to meet you. We'd love to have you.

Before I get started, let me read you one of my e-mails. A clergyman was walking down the street when he came to a group of about a dozen boys, all of them between 10 and 12 years of age. The group surrounded a dog. Concerned the boys were hurting the dog, he went over and asked, "What are you doing with that dog?" One of the boys replied, "This dog is just an old neighborhood stray. We all want him but only one of us can take him home. So we've decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie, we'll get to keep the dog." Of course, the minister was taken back. "You boys shouldn't be having a contest telling lies," he explained. He then launched into a ten-minute sermon about lying beginning with, "Don't you boys know that it's a sin to lie?" And ending with, "When I was your age, I never told a lie." There was dead silence for about a minute and just as the minister was beginning to think he'd gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, "All right, give him the dog." (Laughter)

All right, let's hold up our bibles and make our confession. Let's say it like you mean it today.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly

confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Open your bibles please to Mark 16. I count it a real joy and an honor to have the opportunity to share with you each week. This is such an exciting time to be alive. I believe we have entered into the very beginning stages of a tremendous move of God. The Holy Spirit is at work in the earth today in an unprecedented way preparing people's hearts for the gospel. Even the secular media is now acknowledging that people today more than ever are concerned about their spiritual being. Both Time Magazine and the Wall Street Journal recently reported that there is a spiritual awakening taking place worldwide. God's Spirit is literally quickening and awakening and softening the hearts of millions and millions of people. We are in a supernatural season of harvest and I don't believe any of us are here by accident. God has chosen us to be at this particular place and at this particular time in history before the foundation of the world so that we could help carry out His plan. God has something for each and every one of you to do. He's got something specifically for you to do. And Jesus tells us very clearly what it is in Mark 16:15, a real familiar passage of scripture. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." One translation says, "Preach the Good News to everybody everywhere."

And I'm here today to challenge you, stir yourselves up and get busy sharing the good news with the people that you know. God is counting on you. Don't make the mistake of waiting around until everything gets perfectly straightened out in your life before you begin to reach out to people in need. Too often we say, God, as soon as you get me out of all my problems, then I'm going to witness to my family and friends. God, as soon as you deliver me from this big mess then I'm going to really get on fire for you Lord. But friends, if you're waiting for every single detail in your life to be perfectly in order before you step out in faith and before you reach out to people in need, then you're going to spend your whole life just waiting around. And that's the trick of the enemy. He would love to keep you so busy and so focused only on your own needs that you become oblivious to the fact that there are hundreds and hundreds of people around you every single day that are hurting and lonely and they've never even felt the love of God. And may God forgive us and help us if we get so caught up in our own affairs that we allow our own friends and family members to go out into eternity without knowing the Lord. God's going to hold us responsible. And the longer I live, the more I realize there's no such thing as a problem free life. Sometimes we live in this unreal world where we think we're going to come to a point in life where we're never going to have another challenge and we're never going to face another adversity. We think if we can just get through this one last struggle, then we'll be home free. But friends, I don't mean to be negative in any way whatsoever but the truth is throughout life we are going to constantly face challenges. And the only reason I continually belabor this point is so that you won't live a frustrated life just because you're facing tough times. There's no such thing as the perfect husband or the perfect job or the perfect boss or the perfect family. As long as you have a mother-in-law you will have problems. (Laughter) That was a very difficult line with my mother-in-law sitting here. Forgive me Georgina, I'm not talking about you. She's the best. It was easier in the 8:30 service. I heard a joke

the other day. Do you know what the punishment is for bigamy in Texas? Two mother-in-laws.

But sometimes we live in this fantasy world where we think we're going to come to this place in life, you know, somewhere over the rainbow, just like the movies, we're going to live happily ever after with no more problems. But friends, if we're not careful, we will allow the enemy to deceive us into waiting around and doing nothing for God until this so called problem free life exists. Satan loves for God's people to procrastinate. Friends, what we do for God, we must do now. And the hour is too late for any of us to live with an inward focus where we're only concerned about our own needs. That's so shortsighted. That's such small thinking. God's already promised us that He's going to take care of us. He's promised us that He will never leave us nor forsake us. There's a whole world out there that has never even felt the life-changing power of Jesus Christ. Millions and millions of people are hurting, they're lonely, they're in pain. They don't even know what real love is. And the only way we're going to really shake this city and make a positive, powerful impact on people all over this world is for every single one of us to do our part and go out of here like flames of fire and share God's love and mercy and forgiveness with people in need.

See, every believer in the new testament is a minister. You've got to be responsible for your family and your friends. Make sure that they know the Lord. Are you doing everything you can possibly do? You've got to write that letter. Make that phone call. Visit that neighbor. We are the body of Christ on the earth. God has no arms to love and hug except your arms. God has no voice to encourage and uplift except your voice. The only smile that God has here on this earth is your smile. We are ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ. We represent Jesus while we're here on this earth. We've got to each do our part and reach out to our friends and family members that are in need. And we have such good news to share with the world. John 3:16. Think of the incredible scripture. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would simply believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life."

Think about what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 10. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." See, the Good News is that your sins have already been forgiven. The price has already been paid. Jesus willingly died on that cross and shed His own blood as a sacrifice for all your mistakes and all your failures and all your shortcomings. And now all you have to do is accept this free gift of salvation and make Jesus the Lord of your life. God made it so easy. But sometimes religion with all its rules and regulations and do's and don'ts, it gives us a false idea of what God is really like.

But friends, God is not mad at you. God is not out to get you. God is not standing over you with a snarl on His face and with a ball bat in His hand just waiting to knock you down into hell for the next mistake you make. Don't ever think like that. God is a good God. And God is on your side. The Bible says, "God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world or to judge the world or to pass sentence upon the world; but God sent Jesus so that the world through him might be saved."

And friends, if anybody is judging you or passing sentence on you or condemning you, I guarantee you it is not from God. And when we go out of here, we've got to make sure we share the Good News. People already feel enough guilt and

condemnation and shame. They know what they're doing wrong. You don't have to tell them. You don't have to convince them. Most of the time that just makes them more defensive. 99% of the time, every one of us here deep down on the inside we know when we're doing right; we know when we're doing wrong. You can fool a lot of people but you can't fool yourself. But see, God never called us to point out each other's mistakes. Jesus said in Luke 3:37, "Judge not so that you will not be judged; and condemn not so that you will not be condemned." One of the few times God tells us to judge, He says, "Judge yourself".

See, the Bible says the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin. You don't have to do it. Leave it up to God. God can do it for you. And see, I'm thoroughly convinced that showing people God's love and mercy and forgiveness has a far greater impact than just continually beating people over the head for every single mistake they make. See, all of us make mistakes. We're all human. Jesus said, "Let him without sin cast the first stone." And I know some people when I talk like that, they say, "Joel, you make it way too easy. Nobody's ever going to get saved unless you dangle them over the fires of hell and scare them a little bit." Some people's main doctrine is to try to scare the "hell" of out people. Victoria does that when she's driving. (Laughter)

But seriously, some people think the only way to reach people is to point out all their faults and to shame them and to belittle them and to manipulate their emotions to where they feel so much condemnation and guilt that they finally feel like such a no good rotten loser that they'll repent and turn to God. But friends, I believe just the opposite is true. The Bible says "It is the goodness of God that leads people to repentance."

And if people can ever really see how good our God is, they'll come running to Him. If they can ever really see how awesome His love is and how unlimited His mercy is and how incredibly kind and compassionate and forgiving He is, they will want to serve a God like that. If we can ever really just show the world what our God is really and truly like. I know some people, you think, Joel, this sound too good to be true. What about all the terrible things I've done in the past? I've cheated a lot of people. I've stolen. I've cursed God's name. I haven't been faithful and on and on and on we can go.

But friends, I'm here to tell you today, no matter what you've done, no matter how many mistakes you've made, no matter how big of a mess you have made in your life, I want you to know today that God is still not mad at you. Jesus is standing before each one of you right now with His arms held open wide. He's got a smile on his face and He's saying, Come unto me. Give me a chance with your life. You've tried it on your own. Let me show you what true peace and true happiness and true fulfillment is really all about. Jesus wants to be your best friend.

And see, friends, this is the good news we have to share with the world. People are sick and tired of the same old dead religion that condemns you and tells you what a lousy rotten person you are. Nobody wants to be in bondage like that. Religion tells you if you if you make any kind of mistake, especially if you go through some kind of divorce or some kind of moral failure that you might as well just go to the back of the line. Forget it. God's through with you. You are all washed up.

But listen friends, the first person Jesus ever revealed Himself to as the Messiah was a woman that had been married five times and was now living in adultery with the

sixth man. And the pity is that woman would not even be accepted in many of the churches of our day. And all these religious man made rules and regulations, they're cold and they're hard and they're mean. And they're just the opposite for what our God is like. Maybe the original intent was good, but all they really do is drive people away from God.

Like I said, Who wants to be in bondage? Religion tells us women aren't supposed to have any type of leadership in the church. They should just sit back on the sidelines. They're not supposed to preach, they're not supposed to have any type of authority. But isn't it interesting that when Jesus arose from the dead, the very first two people He appeared to were women. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James. And He said, Go tell this good news that I am alive. And do you realize that everything Christianity is today is a result of the obedience of these two women? Isn't that great? (Applause)

And thank God somebody didn't get to them first and say, you're not supposed to preach, that's against our doctrine. See, religion tells you if you don't do enough good works, God's not going to save you. He's not going to love you. He's not going to bless you. But the Bible says in Ephesians 2:8, and you all know this, "It is by grace we are saved through faith and that not of ourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any of us could boast."

See, religion tears you down, but Jesus builds you up. Religion tells you what you can't do. But Jesus tells you what you can do. Religion brings bondage, but Jesus brings life and freedom and liberty. And I know people say, Joel, you're just giving people a license to sin when you talk like that. As daddy used to say, You don't need a license. If you want to sin, you can sin.

But listen friends, when you really know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, not in your head but deep down in your heart, you don't want to displease Him. You don't want to sin. See, I sin all I want to, I just don't want to. I don't have to get drunk and go party with the world to have a good time. I don't have to sleep around to be fulfilled. I don't have to smoke crack to get high. We get high every time we come out here to Lakewood, don't we? (Applause)

But friends, don't get Jesus mixed up with religion because there's a big difference. When you go out to share the good news, you share about the life in Jesus. If you study the life of Jesus, you'll see that He always reached out to the people that were the least likely ones to become a Christian. Usually, they were the ones that were written off by the rest of society. He forgave those who were stained by sin. He always uplifted the fallen. He comforted the broken hearted. Throughout His life here on this earth, He specialized in giving people a new beginning. And you know what? He's no different today. He loves each and every one of you with an everlasting love. He wants to pick you up and dust you off and give you a fresh new start in life.

And I know some of you have gone through a personal tragedy and you're tempted to throw in the towel and just give up. Maybe your dreams have been shattered and the enemy's trying to convince you that God can't use you anymore. He doesn't have anymore plans for you. Listen friends, don't you dare listen to those lies. Our God is a God of second chances. Some of you are feeling so guilty and so condemned and just feeling so ashamed because you've displeased the Lord. But I want to tell you today that God has already forgiven you. And He's not finished with you. He's not

through with you. Don't give into self-pity. See, God can resurrect your dreams. And I believe He can make the second half of your life much greater and much more rewarding and much more fulfilling than you've ever even dreamed of. God specializes in giving people a new beginning.

And that's what Lakewood Church is all about. In 1959 when momma and daddy founded this church, they said, Go out and find the drug addicts. Find the prostitutes. Find all the people that are down and out. Find all the people that have all the money in the world but they're still empty. Go find all the hurting and lonely people and tell them there's an oasis of love where they can come and not be beat down and condemned. Tell them there's a place that they can come where God will receive them back with open arms. Tell them there's a place that they can come of unconditional love and guaranteed acceptance. Tell them there's a place where God's love and mercy and forgiveness freely flow. And is it any wonder that we stand here some 41 years later with thousands and thousands of people still being drawn to this same Oasis of Love. And even though daddy's not here, the message is the same. Is it any wonder that all these different races-blacks, whites, hispanics, Asians-we all gather here week by week and sit next to each other and nobody even notices the color of our skin. (Applause)

Is it any wonder that the rich sit next to the poor? And the people with great intellect sit next to the people that have never even finished high school? See, this is what church is supposed to be like. And the good news we have to tell the world is that God is a God of unconditional love. God is not stiff and old fashioned and irrelevant. God doesn't care if you wear a suit and tie or blue jeans and t-shirt. God doesn't care if your hair is long or short. God doesn't care if you're good looking like me or ugly like my brother. (Laughter) I can pick on Paul because he knows I love him. If I pick on my mother, all the people on television write me. I get in trouble.

But God doesn't care about any of those superficial things, He looks right through that. All that really matters is do you have a sincere desire to please the Lord? Don't let your past stop you from coming to God. And don't let your past stop you from doing exactly what God wants you to do. I've met hundreds and hundreds of people the last few months. And they tell me, Joel, I hadn't been to church in many, many years because I've made some big mistakes in life and I was too ashamed to go back. But I started watching Lakewood on television, hearing about God's love and forgiveness and I came out here and I've never missed a service since. See, people tell me all the time, Joel, everybody looks so happy out there at Lakewood. They're so enthusiastic. They look like they actually enjoy church. And friends, we are. We've got a good reason to be happy. We know that our sins are forgiven. (Applause) We know that God's not mad at us anymore. He's not out to get us. The Bible says, "In God's presence there's fullness of joy." And we celebrate the risen Savior every single service.

But unfortunately this is extremely rare to a lot of people because organized religion through all these years has formed these great big barriers called denominations that separate God's people. And many of our church services today are so influenced by the traditions of men that they are so weak and so powerless and so dull and so boring, nobody wants to attend, especially people my age. They say, Joel, what's the us? What's the purpose? I don't get anything out of church. It's not even relevant.

Those of you viewing, I say this in all humbleness, but if you're in a church like that and you're not getting anything out of it, you have got to find you a church that will teach you the Word of God so that you can grow and be uplifted and find a church that believes in the supernatural power of God. Church ought to be relevant to you. (Applause)

Don't any of you go sit in and hear a dull boring lecture that doesn't do you any good. We ought to leave every service more on fire for the Lord with more knowledge of God's Word, built up in the things of God. People ask me all the time, Joel, what denomination is Lakewood? And I'm so happy I can tell them we're not any denomination. We're just a group of believers that are on fire for the Lord and that are excited about what God is doing. (Applause)

I don't want any labels on this church. We're just Lakewood Church. Don't call us Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostals, Charismatics. See look, those groups may want to turn right when God wants to go straight. And I guarantee you we have determined in our heart that we're going to follow after God no matter which way man goes. Amen? (Applause)

But I challenge you today to go out of here and share this good news. Your assignment begins when we dismiss these services. And don't let the enemy talk you into putting it off. There'll never be a better time than right now. And God's doing something so incredible out here at Lakewood Church. The last month in January, including our kids and young people, we've seen over 1,500 people give their hearts to the Lord. Isn't that awesome?

See, friends, we are in a supernatural season of harvest and every one of you ought to take advantage of this window of opportunity and get your friends and family members and neighbors in here. Proverbs 10:5 says, "A son that sleeps in the time of harvest is a son that causes shame." Paul told Timothy, "Never lose your sense of urgency." We are people of destiny. God has raised us up for such a time as this. You and I are a part of a great church that has been a light house to this dark world for many, many years. Let's stir ourselves up and not become stagnant.

When daddy died last January, a year ago, God spoke to me so clearly. He said, Joel, don't walk but run with the vision. The hour is late. The Lord could come back at any time. Things are winding down. And what we do for God we must do now. And in the coming months, we're going to announce some bold plans to impact this generation. We cannot continue at the same pace. God is accelerating everything. We have seen the number of salvations accelerated. We've seen our growth in our attendance and in our finances accelerated. But friends, I don't believe we've seen anything yet. God is going to accelerate things in a much, much greater fashion in the coming days.

And I challenge you to have a big vision and an open mind and be a part of the new thing God is going to do for us here at Lakewood Church. Don't be lazy and get negative and get critical. No, this is a time of new beginnings. God's enlarging our vision. And these are bold times and it's going to take people with a bold vision to really shake this city and to change this world. Jesus said in John 4:35, "Don't say there are still four months and then comes the harvest. Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look around, for the fields they are white already to harvest."

And my prayer is that God will birth in each and every one of us a new passion and a new fire and a new enthusiasm to win our friends and family members to the Lord. We have already been empowered. God has given us everything we need. We are well able to do what He called us to do. We have been trained for this hour. Let's just don' sit on the sidelines idly by. It's time to get in the race. And let's everybody get busy and do our part and share this good news with everybody everywhere. And I believe if we do this, this will usher in one of the greatest moves of God this world has ever seen. Our churches will not be able to hold the people. We'll see so many miracles and so many supernatural manifestations of God's power that this world will literally be turned upside down. And they'll know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our God is indeed alive and well and Jesus Christ is the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Amen. Let's give Him praise. (Applause)

FAITH

"BELIEVE GOD FOR THE GREATER WORKS"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #FA_001 - 3/19/00

OPENING: The only thing that matters starts today! At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. Join us this Sunday. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!(Applause)

DODIE: Amen. We're glad you've joined us by television today. And I want to share this scripture with you. It'll bless you. It's John 14 in the Living Bible, number 21, verse 21. "The one who obeys me is the one who loves me. And because he loves me, the Father will love him and I will too." Jesus said this. The Father will love us and He will too. "And I will reveal myself to him." Do you want Jesus to reveal Himself to you? I do. I say "Here I am, Jesus. Right here. Reveal Yourself to me because I love You. I love the Father." And when we do that, then He will reveal Himself to us. Aren't you glad we serve a God like that? Amen. (Applause)

JOEL: Well, we do welcome all of you to Lakewood Church. We love you. We know God's got great things in store for your lives. The Bible says that God is a giver of good things to His children. So be encouraged today. And those of you watching by television, we always like to give you a personal invitation to come out here and see us at Lakewood. We're honored to come into your homes each week. But we want you to come see us whenever you can. We'd love to meet you in person and we just give you that personal invitation.

Are you ready to study God's Word? Hold up your Bibles and let's say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Say it like you mean it. I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) God bless you!

SERMON: You may be seated. Ya'll sound good. This is such an exciting time to be alive. And I stand in awe of what God is doing for us here at Lakewood Church. Only God could take us through our darkest hour and bring us through with such great victory. You know, last month, we had over 1,700 people give their hearts to the Lord right here at Lakewood. Isn't that awesome? (Applause)

I really believe we have entered into the very beginning stage of a tremendous move of God. And what's going to happen right here in Houston, Texas is going to literally astound people all over the world. This is a new day. And God's doing a new thing. The prophet Joel said, "In the last days, God was going to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh."

And we are living in that day he spoke about. And we're already seeing a little of that begin to happen. But we haven't even touched the surface of what God really wants to do. I believe in the coming days, we're going to see people from all different denominational backgrounds join together side by side in an unprecedented show of unity with their hands lifted high in the air in praise and worship to our God. See, God is awakening this generation to the fact that these denominational names and all these petty little differences that have separated us for so many years, they're not really important. All that really matters is do we bear the name of Jesus?

And see, I strongly believe these walls are starting to come down. And God is going to use us here at Lakewood to be very instrumental in ushering in a new fresh wave of His fullness. And a new fresh wave of His Glory. And no man is going to be able to stop it. No religious organization is going to be strong enough to keep it from happening. No political power is going to be able to contain it. The devil and demon forces, they can't do anything about it.

Friends, this is something that God has ordained before the foundation of the world. When God says it's going to happen, there's no ifs, ands, or buts, it's definitely going to happen. Just as God has spoken these worlds into existence, He has spoken this fresh new wave of His Spirit into existence as well.

I believe in the coming days, ministers from all across our city, from all different denominations, are going to be united as never before. And it's going to be this unity in the Body of Christ that's going to be the catalyst to spark a tremendous move of God that no man can deny. It's going to be so strong and so powerful and so obvious that even the worst skeptics, even the most hard-nosed unbelieving atheist, they're going to be changed in a split second by the power of God. (Applause)

See friends, I believe there's something big over the horizon. And how we need to all recognize that God has chosen you and me to help usher in this fresh new wave of His Spirit. We're not here by accident. You and I are people of destiny. We've been raised up for this hour. And each one of us need to stir ourselves up and begin to believe God for bigger and greater things. That's what Jesus said, John 14:12, look at it there. He said, "He that believeth in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go to my Father."

See friends, it's time that we start believing God for the greater works. These are the last days. And God wants us to enlarge our vision and dream bigger dreams. Let's quit putting God in a box. He wants to do things much quicker and much greater than we've ever imagined. God wants to use all of you more. Quit limiting Him with your small thinking. If you think small, then you're going to believe for small things. God wants you to go beyond those old barriers of the past. He wants you to step out in faith and begin to believe Him for bigger, extraordinary, unusual things. And quit telling God how to fix your problem. He's God. He knows how. He may not do it exactly like you tell Him, but God's got His own special ways. His ways are higher and greater than our ways. Amen?

One of my favorite scriptures is 2nd Chronicle 16:9, "The eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in behalf of them whose hearts are perfect toward him." God is constantly searching for somebody to pour out His supernatural power and love and wisdom on. And my challenge to all of you today is to be one of those people God is looking for. Have a strong desire in your heart to see the supernatural power of God in your life.

Can you imagine what would happen to this city if every one of us would allow God to display His incredible power through our lives? God is searching for somebody. I say, "God, search no more. Here we are. The people of Lakewood Church." See, and I believe in these coming days, we're going to see so many miracles that's it's going to be real common. We're going to see so many lives supernaturally changed that our churches aren't going to be able to hold the people. I believe we're going to start seeing some of these greater works not for our benefit, not for our glory, but as a sign to this unbelieving world that our God is alive and well.

See, these greater works will lift up the name of Jesus. And when you do that, the Bible says that all people will be drawn unto Him. Nothing gets the attention of people any faster than when some of these people that have cancer get prayed for and then they come back in a few weeks and say, "Look, the doctor examined me. I don't have any more cancer in my body." That's what will shake this city. See, nothing will have a bigger impact on this city than when some of these notorious sinners come in here and get radically changed by the power of God. See, that'll spread like wildfire.

And maybe some of you watching today, you feel like you're one of those sinners. Maybe you're just flipping through the dial and maybe you're living a life of drugs, crime, alcohol, prostitution. I don't know what you're involved in. Maybe you're just a mean, hateful person. You don't think God cares about you. You don't think He'd have anything to do with you. And you certainly don't think any church would accept you. But friend, I want to tell you you're wrong. This church will accept you with open arms-(Applause) Amen.

We don't care what you've done in the past. This is a place of love. This is a place of hope and healing where God can give you a new beginning. This is a place of guaranteed acceptance. We don't care what kind of life you're living right now. Don't let that stop you. We're here to love you. Not tell you what a lousy rotten person you are. The least thing we're interested in is in your past. All we're interested in is your future. You've got to come just as you are. Don't worry about what you wear. Don't worry about what you look like. None of us looked very good before God got a hold of us. I can promise you that. And see, you just come just as you are and I promise you we will receive you with an unconditional love. You will feel at home. You will feel welcome. God will meet you right where you are.

See, friends, one of the reasons God has so blessed us here at Lakewood throughout all these years is because we have always gladly and openly accepted sinners into our midst. That's what church is all about. But I believe in these coming days, God is going to do some unusual, extraordinary things. We can't get complacent. Don't get too comfortable. Don't get too set in your ways because when God moves in the last days it's going to be much more radical than ever before.

See, we've just go to learn to go with the flow and stay open. I don't know what all God has in store for us. But my attitude is "God, whatever it is, we're ready. We're open. We'll be quick to obey. We are your children and we will be obedient."

God showed me a few things He wants to do in the coming days. And you know my first thought was "Man, God, that's a little different. That's not what we're used to. That's not how we're used to doing it." But listen friends, I'm convinced that the hour is late, time is short, so God is picking up the pace.

We have entered into this final stretch and God has saved some of His most trustworthy, some of His strongest, fastest, most well trained people for this final leg. And that's all of you and that's me. And God wants us to be the forerunner in this new wave of His Spirit. God wants us to help usher it in. And it's so important that we recognize the time in which we live.

See, growing up, I was a long distance runner. And I used to race in a lot of these 2, 3, 4, 5-mile races. When we would start, all of us runners would have to pace ourselves. If not, you'd run out of steam. You couldn't sprint the whole way. So we'd run at this nice, even, steady pace. But the closer we got to the finish line, the faster we would run, obviously. And all through that race, you could gradually feel the pace accelerating. By the time we entered into that final mile, the speed was significantly faster than when we first began. What happened? Nobody made any big announcement over the loud speaker system and said, "You'd better run faster now, the race is winding down." No, every runner was extremely aware of exactly how many laps were left. By the time we turned the corner for that final lap, we were in an all out sprint. It looked like we were running the hundred-yard dash. Why were we running so fast? This was a 3, 4-mile race. It was because we had entered into the final stretch. The race was winding down. This was the time to give it our all, give it our best. And see, constantly through that race, we had to adjust and adapt to what stage of the race we were in.

And see, friends, I believe that the church has entered into its final lap in the race that God has laid out before the beginning of time. I've said it often, but we are living in a very critical, significant and historic day in God's time table. Things are winding down. This is the final stretch. This is a tremendous day to be alive. I trust you feel this sense of destiny. Bible prophesy is being fulfilled as never before. I firmly believe we could be the generation that ushers in the return of Jesus Christ. At any moment we could hear the trumpet sound. We could look up there and see in the Eastern sky the Lord riding on that white horse full of majesty, full of power, full of glory, calling us to come on home and be with Him. That could happen at any moment. And I know some of you may not think that's true. You may think that's kind of strange. You say, Joel, that sounds really far out. But friends, you're right, our God is a far out God. Heaven is a far out place.

And see, if you can't see that everything is coming to a close just like the Bible predicted hundreds and hundreds of years ago, then you're living with your head in the sand. If you don't think we're living in the last of the last days, you're only kidding yourself.

There's a scripture in the book of Daniel, chapter 12, that makes it so clear. Daniel wrote this some 2,500 years ago, yet it describes exactly the day we're living in right now. Let me read it to you. The Holy Spirit said in verse 4, "But thou, O Daniel, shut

up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end when many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased." Notice it says at the end of time, knowledge will be increased. One translation calls that "technology". What does that mean though? "Many shall run to and fro". Well, listen to how the Living Bible puts it. "Daniel, keep the prophesy a secret until the end times when travel and education shall vastly increase." Daniel said 2,500 years ago, you will know you're living in the end times when travel and technology have greatly increased.

I don't think too many of us would disagree we're living in that day right now. Has travel increased? Certainly it has. Some of you older folks can really appreciate this. I don't mean it to be funny. But my dad used to talk about when he was growing up just 70 years ago, how he used to travel with his family by horse and buggy into town every Saturday night. I heard him tell me that a hundred times. (Laughter) Talking about the farm, playing the fiddle, and all that. But isn't it funny that in his lifetime, or basically in his generation, you can go get on a plane this afternoon at George Bush Airport? The Denekarens are leaving and tomorrow morning they're going to be around the world. Millions and millions of people travel to all parts of the world every single day. We have people in our congregation that commute regularly to Europe. Have you noticed the airport's getting larger and larger? Travel has certainly increased. I don't have to convince ya'll on that.

But what about education, knowledge, or technology? Well, who can argue that? Just look at the Internet. Is that not unbelievable? You know as well as I know you buy a computer today and three months later, it's outdated. I was reading where a 20-year old computer that used to take up 10,000 square feet of office space can now be contained in the same size computer chip that's used to play the music on this greeting card. Unbelievable. "Oh happy day"! That's "Oh, happy day".

Technology has so increased. I was thinking about Victoria and I bought a new vehicle at the end of last year. A standard feature on this vehicle, and we didn't even ask for it, was this tracking device where a command center in another state can monitor any place that vehicle goes. It's constantly being tracked by these global positioning satellites. Ya'll probably heard of GPS. You can push a button on the dash and it'll call them up. They'll come on through your stereo speakers and say, "Hello, Mr. Osteen, I see you traveling East on 610 crossing Ella. How can I help you?" You can ask them where-(Laughter) I'm serious. You can ask them where the nearest restaurant is; the nearest gas station; you can ask them what time it is, if you want to. The point is that you know you're constantly being watched after. I mean that's technology.

I was explaining to Victoria how it worked when we first got the thing. And how you'd never be out of touch. She was always being watched. And she didn't like that. She said, I don't want anybody watching me every place I go. I don't want anybody constantly looking after me. She wanted to disconnect it. And I said, "Listen, Victoria, you can forget it. Because I've already informed them to call me-(laughter) I've already informed them to call me anytime this vehicle gets close to the Galleria." (Laughter) But-God supernaturally answered my prayers. He works in mysterious ways. But we don't have to argue, technology and travel have definitely increased. And friends, don't let Satan deceive you into just drifting through life carelessly with no purpose. This is no time to compromise and live a half-hearted Christian life. This is no time to slink back and be lazy and indifferent and kind of have an "I don't care" attitude. Friends, this is a time of separation. The Bible says clearly in the last days

"the godly will become more godly and the evil man will become more evil." This is no time to be playing games with God trying to live half the time in the world and half the time for God. Friends, God doesn't have any part-time employees. You're either all in or you're all out. There's not any in between. (Applause)

Now is the time more than ever to give God your all. Give God your best. You've got to recognize that stage of the race we're in. We are in the final stretch. God is looking for people that are totally committed and extremely determined to follow Him wherever He leads them. God's looking for people that will stay pure and open and honest and consecrated before Him. That's why the Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:1, "Brothers, I beg you, I beg you by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, consecrated, devoted, pleasing to the Lord." God's looking for a group of people that are sold out and that will strive for excellence in their walk with Him.

I love this scripture in Hebrews 11:4, just a little phrase. It says that "Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." In other words, Abel did not settle for mediocrity. He served God with his whole heart regardless of his circumstances. He didn't just serve God when everything was rosy, the skies were blue and everything was going good in his life. He didn't just serve God on Sundays when everybody could see him. He didn't just serve God when he felt like it. No, Abel made up his mind. He was determined in his heart that nothing was going to stop him from serving God 100% of the time, all of the time, giving God a hundred percent. He was extremely focused on what God called him to do. He constantly examined his heart. He kept himself pure before the Lord. He did his part.

Does it make a difference? Does God really even notice? Does it really even matter? Sure it does, friends. Now, Abel is listed as one of the heroes of faith right next to Abraham and David and Moses. What did Abel do? Slay a giant? Write the Ten Commandments? Part the Red Sea? No. He simply gave God his best. He gave God his all. He wasn't weak and indecisive and spineless. He was strong-willed and determined. He had a made up mind and he constantly laid aside these weights and the sin that tried to get him off course. Now he's listed as one of our heroes of faith simply because he gave God a more excellent sacrifice with his life.

So many people today, they've got the attitude, you know, God I'll serve you as long as it doesn't inconvenience me. God, as long as it doesn't get in the way of my busy schedule at work. God, as long as it doesn't take away from my family time. Then, I'll read my Bible; then I'll pray. Then I'll go faithfully to church. But friends, that kind of attitude is not pleasing to the Lord. I'll be real frank with you. God doesn't want your leftovers, He wants your best. He wants your all. (Applause)

And God will reward you when you strive for excellence in your walk with the Lord. He sees your faithfulness. Don't ever think that He doesn't notice every time you go that extra mile to help that person in need. He sees that. Don't ever think He doesn't see those mornings when you get up early to seek His face and pray and read His Word. He sees that. He takes that into account. He notices every single time you come to church. Especially those times when you've had a hard week and you don't really feel like it. You're tired. But you don't give in. You come anyway and you pour your heart out in worship to God. God sees that excellent sacrifice you're giving Him. And He will reward you greatly. God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "If you seek me first and make pleasing me your highest priority in your life, then I'll make sure that you have every single thing you need." If you can just lay aside your own natural desires and just not get caught up in the rat race all around you, just stay pure and open and honest before the Lord, constantly search your heart and then always strive for excellence in your walk with the Lord, then God says that everything else in your life is going to fall perfectly into place. Isn't that a tremendous promise?

See, I just want to challenge you again today to recognize the time in which we're living. One of my favorite scriptures is 1st Corinthians 2:9, "No man has ever seen, heard, or even imagined the wonderful things God has in store for those that love the Lord." I believe God has saved some of these greater works for these last days. Now, He's simply looking for people that have some passion; people that have some fire in their bones; people that are not ashamed of the supernatural power of God; people that have a strong desire to make a difference; people that will dare step out in faith and believe God for extraordinary things.

Paul said in Romans 12:11, "Never lag in zeal, but serve the Lord with enthusiasm." God doesn't need anymore crybabies that whine and complain about how bad life's treating them. No friends, this is the time to rise up, start taking control of your lives, start ruling over your emotions, and let's look at the big picture. These are the last of the last days. And what we do for God we've got to do now. Some of you have been putting off and putting off and putting off getting your life really right with God. Friends, don't put it off any longer. Today is the day of salvation. Some of you have been procrastinating when it comes to really getting serious and letting God use you to reach out to your family and friends and neighbors. Friends, now is the time to get extremely focused and begin to reach out and minister to those people in need. And let's start believing God for bigger things. Don't limit Him with your small thinking. Just because it's never been done before doesn't mean God won't do it for you. You can be the first. God has some greater works in store for us. And He's constantly searching for somebody that will simply believe Him and trust Him to do the extraordinary things. Jesus said, "We have not because we ask not". We've got to learn to be quick to ask. You and I have been raised up for this hour. Whether you realize it or not, we're in the process of ushering in a tremendous move of God. It's going to be so big, the whole world is going to be impacted. And friends, it's not going to happen just inside the church, it's going to happen in your everyday lives. Miracles are going to be just as common on the streets as they are in the church building. And because you have chosen to offer God a more excellent sacrifice with your life, He is going to pour out His supernatural blessings, His supernatural favor and wisdom on you and bless you in such an extraordinary way that you're not even going to be able to contain it. Some of your friends and family members that you have basically written off, you don't think there's any hope for them, God is going to touch them and change them in a split second and turn their life around. (Applause)

And I believe this new wave of God's glory is going to spread like wildfire. Friends, it's going to happen because we have a big vision, a world vision, an inclusive vision to reach every person regardless of their denomination, regardless of their race, regardless of their sin, regardless of their lifestyle, regardless of their social standing. It's going to happen because all of us allow God's love and mercy and supernatural power to flow freely out of our lives.

And I believe God today is saying the same thing to you that He said to Zerubabbel many years ago in Zechariah 4:6. Thank God, momma didn't name me Zerubabbel. (Laughter) He's saying the same thing to you. "There is no mountain too high for you, there is no obstacle too difficult for you to overcome. Even though you may feel weak, you may not feel like you have it in your own ability, God says, don't worry about that, because it's not going to happen by your own might, it's not going to happen in your own strength, it's not going to happen through your own power. It is going to happen because of the supernatural power of the Living God." God says- (Applause) Amen. God says, "It's not by might, not by power, but it is by the Spirit of the Living God."

Friends, we are well able to do everything God has called us to do. And I challenge you again to rise up and begin to believe God for the greater works. And you'll see your circumstances change. You'll see your friends and family members change. And this will magnify God. It'll bring glory to God and more people will be drawn into His kingdom and we'll just continue to give Him more praise and glory and honor for the great things that He does in our lives. Amen? Let's give the Lord a big hand clap. (Applause)

We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!

BATTLE OF THE MIND

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 1"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_001 - 5/9/99

DODIE: I just wanted to greet you today. I'm so glad you joined in on television. And it's so wonderful that we could bring the television to your homes or wherever you are. We're just delighted to do that.

Some of you have heard my husband tell the story about our son Paul. He said, and you'll remember this here, "Daddy, are you in there," at night. Remember when he was a little boy? "Daddy, is your face turned toward me?" Well this is our son Paul Osteen; and he and his beautiful wife Jennifer are here visiting with us today from Little Rock. And I just wanted you to be acquainted with who he is. He's a surgeon. He's a fine young man and I'm proud of him. He's not here with us but he's here in spirit. And so I wanted you to give Paul and his family a handclap. Would you, please? (Applause)

JOEL: We are glad to have everybody here today. Glad to have all the visitors, have all of you. And as I say often, I'm honored to be up here to be able to share with you. You know it's certainly nothing that I dreamed of, but it happened though.

But I am glad to have my brother Paul here too. I'm glad to have somebody else up on this platform with the last name of Osteen, too. Get up here. You know I was thinking about—Paul was here this weekend and we were reminiscing some. Paul and I, we had a great childhood. We used to do a lot together even though he's 7 years older than I. We used to play baseball together and basketball. He used to drive me around on his mini-bike. We had so many great times.

But I was driving to church this morning and I couldn't help but think about some of the mean things that he did to me also. (Laughter) You know and I thought, "Lord, you've given me the opportunity to stand up in front of thousands of people and... (Laughter) I know the Bible says you've got to return good for evil, but I just prayed, "Lord, wouldn't it be okay this one time to say something to embarrass him?" You know I didn't hear anything audibly, but I sure felt like something inside said, "Yeah, Joel; go ahead and do it." (Laughter) He said, "Do it real good for me." (Laughter)

So let me tell you about Paul. You know we come from—there are 6 of us in our family. And Paul's the unusual one because he's smart. And I always told Paul, "Paul, you've got the brains and I've got the looks." (Laughter) See because growing up I always felt like Paul had a rather large nose, in my opinion. And I always told him, I said, "Paul, when God was passing out noses, you thought He said roses, and said, 'Give me a big red one.'" (Laughter) How am I doing so far?

But Paul taught me some valuable lessons about life, valuable principles. He used to hold me down, as a little kid, and he'd get me on my back and he would lean over me with my arms pinned down. And he would let his saliva drool toward my face. (Laughter) He taught me how to endure hardship. (Laughter) You know if he calculated just right, he would suck it back up, but I can't...(Laughter) I can't tell you how many times he miscalculated and I tasted his spit. (Laughter) And can you believe people let him operate on them? (Laughter)

But I'll tell you one more thing. Paul taught me how to be creative in certain situations, also. You know we used to play tennis almost every summer afternoon. We loved to play tennis together. I don't know why, but God made me a better athlete than he is. But I could beat him about half the time and he'd beat me half the time. And he'd hate losing. He hated losing to his little brother. And so he told me, "Joel, I know what's wrong with my tennis game. I need a new racket." So he went down and bought him this brand new Wilson wooden racket. And I thoroughly expected that the next time we went out to play that I'd get beat. But much to my amazement, I beat him. And at the end of the game, he kind of slammed that toward the ground, just not too hard, but he must of hit it just right. And his brand new racket cracked in two. And he was so disappointed. And the first thing out of my mouth, I said, "Paul, what are we going to tell Momma?" And he thought for a minute and he said, "Joel, we're going to tell Momma that I backed over it with our car." (Laughter) I said, "Paul, that will be lying, wouldn't it?" He said, "No, that's called being creative." (Laughter) Y'all keep egging me on and I'll keep going. Y'all better quit it. (Laughter) No, it's okay to laugh in church. Some of you haven't laughed all week. It's good to break a smile. (Laughter) (Applause)

All right, hold up your bibles. We'll make our confession.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess (I boldly confess) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you; you may be seated. I'm not going to have you turn to any specific opening just yet. I'm going to quote some scriptures. But I want to begin a new series today, today and for the next few weeks on, "Winning the Battle of the Mind," Winning the Battle of the Mind. I really do think it's going to be good because I can think of no other subject or teaching that is needed in the body of Christ than on this subject of our thought life, of guarding our thought life, guarding our minds.

I know God's a Spirit and we've got to worship Him in spirit and in truth. And I know that really faith is of the heart. But we should never underestimate the tremendously important role that our mind plays in our Christian walk, in our walk of faith. See the Bible teaches that mankind is a three-part being. Most of you know this. But you are an eternal spirit; you live in a body; and you have a soul. Your spirit on the inside of your body, that's the real you, it's going to live on forever. Hopefully in everlasting life, if you'll accept the free gift of God's salvation. But then there's a third area of mankind and that's the soulish area. And that is our mind, will and emotions. And that's the area I want to focus on for the next few weeks, and more specifically on the area of our mind, on the area of our mind.

You must understand this statement. The only entrance the enemy has into your personality, into your emotions, into your thoughts is through your mind. It all goes

through your mind. And once you can really understand this and comprehend this, you need to get a revelation of this because then you'll realize that all you have to really do is close one door to the enemy, a very important doorway though, the doorway through your mind; a very important gateway.

You see everything starts with a thought. You every thought about this? Everything starts with a thought: obedience or disobedience, divorce, adultery, envy, jealousy. It all comes through your mind. Your mind is the leader or the forerunner of all of your actions and all of your thoughts. The mind is really the devil's playground and the devil's battleground.

And I've seen so many live negative, defeated, miserable lives because they don't understand what I'm talking about. They don't understand you've got to guard this gateway. Everything comes through your mind.

The enemy knows that if he can keep us, if he can affect our thoughts he knows that he can keep us in bondage, in prison, in captivity for a month, for a year, you know. And for some people, so sadly, for a whole lifetime. All by affecting the way we think. You must understand your mind is the bull's eye of Satan's target. That's what he's shooting for.

Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." You cannot live a positive life with a negative mind. And many times the problems that we face are created from wrong thinking patterns that actually produce the problems.

Well the first thing we need to understand is that we are in a warfare. We are in a battle. Ephesians 6:12 makes it real clear. It says that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the evil rulers of this dark world. Another translation, the Williams translation says it really simply. "Our fight is not against any physical opponent, but against the various powers of evil in the darkness around us, against spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil." Doesn't that make it clear?

Listen folks, we are in a battle. The Bible makes it very clear that there is a warfare going on. But listen, it says it's not a physical warfare. It says it's not tangible. We can't see it, touch it and feel it. The Bible says it's intangible or in other words, it's in the unseen world that all this battle is taking place. And the Bible says in Corinthians that the unseen world is more real than this world. Can you understand that? It says that one-day this world as we know it is going to pass away, but the unseen world is eternal. One version says, "it's deathless and is everlasting."

So the first thing we need to know is that we're in a warfare. There's a battle going on around us and it's in the most important world that there is, the unseen world, the world that's going to last forever.

Well if we're in a battle, the first thing I want to know, and I'll just be real logical with you, is I want to know who my enemy is. I've got to know who I'm fighting against. And the Bible makes it clear in Ezekiel 28. It talks about that Satan was in heaven at one time and he was perfect in beauty and full of wisdom. And the Bible says that he began to exalt himself and to get proud and to get real haughty. And he tried to equal himself with God. He tried to get equal with God and God would have none of that. And the Bible states how God cast Satan out of heaven. In II Corinthian

4:4 says that Satan is the god of this world. And Jesus said in Luke 10:18 that He saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. And the Bible talks about, very clearly, it says, "Your adversary, the devil, goes about seeking whom he may devour." So the Bible makes it clear that Satan is our enemy. He was cast out of heaven. He was full of wisdom and beauty, but God cast him out. And it makes it clear that we are on enemy territory. He is the god of this world. John 10:10 says that he comes to steal and to kill and to destroy from us.

So we must know that we are in a battle, we're in this warfare in the unseen world, and we know that our enemy is the devil and demon forces. And I know some people say, "Joel, you know that sounds like something somebody made up. That sounds like a fairy tale. That sounds like something dreamed up after they ate too much pizza one night." But listen, whether you believe it or not, it is the truth. I wish I could tell you if you hid your head in the sand, it'd go away. But if you're born again, you've got an enemy and you're in a battle and you need to realize you're in that battle or the devil will have a hey-day with you all of your life.

You can't stick your head in the sand and say, "You know Joel, if I don't bother the devil, surely he won't bother me." It doesn't work that way. He just laughs all the way and says, "Look, they're not even paying attention."

You know I liken it to being in a boxing match. You know that if you're in a ring and you've got an opponent and the bell sounds, you know the match is on whether you know it or not. You can go stand in the corner and you know what will happen? Every once in a while that guy will come up and slap you up side the head a couple of times. You know what I mean? Knock you down! He doesn't care. He'll just laugh and say, "Look, they're not even paying attention."

That's why the Bible talks about we've got to be sober, we've got to be vigilant, we've got to put on the whole armor of God. Something we have to do, guys. There's a whole battle going on around us. We can't ignore it. Just because we can't see it, it's still happening.

And I'm amazed at people in 1999 who don't believe in the devil and demon forces. Can you believe that? You don't have to look around this world very far to realize that there is an evil influence in this world. Don't y'all agree with that? Watch the news. It's certainly true. I can't believe you know those students up there at Columbine High School that killed all those people. You can't tell me the devil wasn't having a hey-day in their minds. That is the devil and demon forces at work. We must realize who our enemy is. It is the devil and demon forces. We know we're in a warfare.

Well the next thing I want to know is what kind of tactics does he have? What kind of weapons does he have if I'm fighting against him? You know it's funny because when I played high school basketball, when an opposing team came to our gym for the first time, when we saw their bus drive up you what we'd do? We'd run to the locker room and we'd crack the door open because we'd never played against this team. We wanted to see what they looked like. We wanted to size them up. They couldn't see us but we could see them. And we'd see how tall they were, how short they were, how quick they looked, how strong they looked because we wanted to know how to properly defend ourselves. We wanted to know what we were up against.

Well it's the same way in this battle. I want to know what Satan uses against me. Well Jesus made it very clear in John 8:44. He called Satan the father of lies and all that is false. One translation says that when Satan speaks a lie, he speaks what is natural to him. It's his very own nature. Let me tell you this, folks. Satan's number one weapon in this great battle is lying to you, just not telling you the truth. Has he ever lied to any of you? Certainly, he's lied to every one of us.

And that's why it's so important. I wanted to lay this foundation to show you that you know this tremendous warfare is going on. We've got an enemy that was cast out of heaven. What weapons does he use? He uses lying, deception and lies. Where does the battle take place then? It takes place in our mind. This whole battle is going on in our mind. And that's why I said earlier that it's so important if you can guard the doorway to your mind, you can defeat the enemy and become all God wants you to be. But you've got to close that doorway. You've got to guard your mind.

The Bible's very clear. It says, "Don't give the devil a foothold" or "Give no place to the devil." What does that mean? Don't give him a place in your house, in your car? No, don't give him a place in your mind. Don't listen to his lies that come to you. Don't listen to his evil, negative thoughts that come to your mind. You've got to be able to cast them away.

Well listen, the Bible says that we ought to know Satan's schemes, strategies and tactics. We need to know how he uses these weapons. So let's talk about that for a little while.

You know, I know we say that the devil is dumb and I do believe the devil's dumb for getting kicked out of heaven. But you know I quoted Ezekiel 28 where it said he was full of wisdom, perfect in beauty. Don't think for a minute that when he got kicked out of heaven he lost his wisdom. I think the devil's a lot smarter than we give him credit.

And I don't like to brag on him at all. But I'd like for us to know the way he works because Satan is a master deceiver. He has deceived people for years. He deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden. You know that's where he started it. But you know the devil is very cunning. He's clever. He meticulously plants thoughts, suspicions, fears, doubts, and wonderings in your mind. And you know what he does? He plants them there and he backs up and he says, "Let's see what they'll do with it. Will they accept it or will they cast it down?" And listen, if you accept it, you know what he does? He just laughs and says, "That's great because I've got another one for them and it's going to take them further."

You see, he's been working on human nature for years and years. Think about it. Hundreds of years he's been here. He's been experimenting. He knows how human nature usually reacts. He's a very experienced deceiver.

And I don't say this to scare any of you. Don't even think that. God's power is much greater than the power of the enemy. I know. Amen. Let's give the Lord a handclap. (Applause)

I don't say any of this, one bit to bring fear to your life. But we need to know how he works. And then we can defeat him. Because so many times—What is deception? Deception is something that deceives you, lies to you, gets you off track and you

didn't know it was right. Well listen, I believe Satan comes to attack you at your weakest point, I'd say, at your greatest need. He knows, and don't let this scare you, but he knows your fears. He knows your insecurities. He knows your weaknesses. And that's the area he wants to attack you on.

You say, "Joel, prove that to me." Well think about this. When Jesus was in the wilderness and He had fasted for 40 days. He'd gone without food for 40 days. You know when Satan came to Him to tempt Him. Remember the first point that he tempted Him in? It was the area of Jesus' greatest need: it was hunger. He had gone without food for 40 days. And Satan came to Him and said you know, "Jesus, if you think You're the Son of God, turn these stones into bread." He attacks us at our weakest point, in our greatest need. And we have to be on guard, guard our mind.

And listen the devil's willing to invest any amount of time it takes to defeat you. One of his strongest assets is patience. And listen, his goal is to set up strongholds in our minds. What are strongholds? Strongholds is an erroneous thinking pattern that is contrary to God's word, that will hold you captive, hold you in bondage, hold you back from being all God wants you to be. That's a stronghold. That is his goal. And people we've got to examine our lives and make sure we don't have strongholds in them. We need to cast them down. The Bible says we can pull those down. But some people, he's been working on for years and years and years, and they don't even know it. You know he's such a good deceiver.

I read an account this week of a lady and it was a very interesting story. And she talked about from the earliest time she could remember that she was abused by her dad, not physically but verbally. Her dad just always told her how she was never going to amount to anything, that she was so clumsy, she was never going to make it in life. And just always berating her. And the dad did the same thing to the mom. He was disrespectful to the mom also.

And she told about how she grew up with this domineering father that would just vent his anger on her for no reason at all. And let me stop a minute and say this. Parents, no matter what you do, don't berate and insult your kids. You know you can discipline them and guide them. But you know don't dare start talking to them on a personal level. I talk about words. Negative words are like seeds in our spirit. And if you don't know how to cast them down, many times you'll become what that word is said to you. Because the enemy uses that. Here's what he does. He'll use something that somebody said to you to begin a stronghold in your life. This is so important.

And that girl you know not even at a fault of her own, at a very early age was starting to get a very bitter, negative attitude toward men. Satan was using that way back there. How we need to guard what we say to our own family.

But she went on to say by the time she was 18, she was literally brainwashed by Satan, for lack of better words. He had cause her to replay those thoughts of her dad saying that "You'll never make it. You're never going to amount to anything," thousands and thousands and tens and tens of thousands of times. And by the time she was 18, she was out in this world and she said--How was she suppose to have a normal marital relationship? How was she supposed to be productive when she had this terrible stronghold in her mind? And like I said earlier, almost at no fault of her own. It started years and years ago.

Strongholds start from one thought. It all comes through our mind. One thought. You know being a preacher's kid, I'll give you some generic strongholds. People have said to me, they still say to me to this day. "Joel, I can't come to God because I don't live the right kind of life." They don't realize you give your life to God, you come just as you are and then He begins to change you. See but that's a stronghold. Amen. (Applause) But you see that's a stronghold. That will keep people in bondage. That will send them to eternal punishment if they listen to that.

Other people say to me, "Joel, God can never use me. I've made too many mistakes and really I'm not worthy." See those are wrong thinking patterns that will hold us back from being all God wants us to be. How we ought to examine our lives. And it all starts with a thought.

Let me show you how Satan works. And apply this principle to your own life. It probably won't fit many people here. But Satan will come to you, maybe some of you ladies that are married. And he'll come to you and he'll say, "You know your husband really doesn't appreciate you any more. He's taking you for granted, man." And you know what? He gives you that thought and like I said a while ago, he steps back and he wants to see what you're going to do with it. Are you going to listen to it? Are you going to cast it down? If you listen to it, he'll wait until you totally digest it to give you that next thought. It might be an hour, it might be a week, it might be six months, and it might be a year. He's not in any hurry. So he gives you that thought. And if you accept that and give it credence, you know what he'll do? At the next point he'll come give you another thought and he'll say, "Hey, not only does your husband not appreciate you, not only does he take you for granted, but he really doesn't even love you any more." You know he takes you a step at a time to try to get us off track.

And if you'll believe that, you know what will happen? All of a sudden your attitude's affected, your emotions are affected, your personality is affected all based on lies. He is a master deceiver. How we need to—you know we have a choice when it comes to thoughts. We can cast them down and they'll die stillborn or we can accept them and they'll start to grow. And you've got to remember this whole battle's going on and it's going on in our minds. The devil's main tool is trying to lie to us.

And you know what he'll do? He'll take it a step further. He'll try to make you see everything wrong about your husband, try to get you to see everything negative. Your husband will walk in the back door one night. You won't say a thing. You'll just think it. You'll look at him, you'll think, "Man, what in the world is wrong with that man?" (Laughter) "Look what he's wearing. That suit and that tie doesn't even match. He must be going color blind. You know and look at the gut on that man. That is not the man I married." He'll try to get you to see everything negative about your husband. And you know, look, now everything's affected, now everything's affected. It's all based on lies.

And you know he'll cause you to turn on the TV at just the right time. You'll turn it on one afternoon and there it is. "Guiding Light" is on one afternoon, one of these soap operas. And you'll see a, you know, a beautiful lady and a handsome hunk of a man. They're sitting there having a candlelight, romantic dinner. You know the background is the Pacific Ocean. The sun's going down. The wind's blowing their hair. (Laughter) Get the picture? Real life, huh? And he'll say to you, "You know man, you're missing out. Look how everybody else lives, man." (Laughter) He'll tell

you all the time, "The grass is greener on the other side. You ought to find you somebody else. You should have married somebody like this." Like I heard Lisa, it just reminds me, she said something one time. She said, "You know the grass may be greener on the other side, but it still has to be mowed." (Applause)

But you know that's the way he works. He'll show you that scene and here's this lovey-dovey couple and they're smiling and they're caressing each other and it looks like it's so much real life. And you don't realize that this lady and this man have had more cosmetic surgery than Marvin Zindler's even thought about. (Laughter) You know, how many of you know these soap operas are far from the truth.

You know what he tells you? Is, "Man, you're missing out on romance." Listen, I'll tell you this from practical experience. Victoria and I, we used to be very romantic, then we got married. (Laughter) No listen. Four years ago—no, it's not true. But four years ago when we had our first child, our main word went from romance to survival. (Laughter) Our greatest victory each night is when we get Jonathan and our little six-month-old to bed.

I made the mistake a long time ago in going up there and laying down with Jonathan when it was time to go to bed. And I'd lay down with him until he was completely asleep. And then I'd go out to my bedroom. And you know, I know you're not supposed to do that. But I enjoyed doing it. And, but it gets me sometimes because I've got to figure out when he is completely asleep so that I can leave. Because you know if I leave before he's completely asleep, I've got to start back all over again. And you don't know how many times I've sneaked out of his room and on the last step my ankle popped and his head pops up and says, "Where are you going, Daddy?" (Laughter) I feel like I'm caught.

But man, once I finally get Jonathan to bed and Victoria gets little Alexandra to bed, I go down stairs and Victoria's got sweat running off her brow. Got the little baby down. We give each other a high five and I say, "Victoria, I'd love to talk to you, but man, we've got to get to sleep quick. They're going to be awake again." (Laughter)

?But you know, I don't know how my mom did it, raising five kids. Getting all of us to bed. That reminds me, since Paul's here I've got to tell another story on him. (Laughter) Lisa told you. Y'all probably heard the other night is one time Lisa was brushing her teeth and she was about to run in to go to bed at night. And Paul saw this. She was like 13 years old. And Paul saw this and Paul ran under Lisa's bed and just laid completely still underneath the mattress and everything. And sure enough, Lisa went in and five or ten minutes later Lisa was dozing off about to go to sleep. And here comes Paul's hand up across the mattress like that. (Laughter) Lisa screamed. She didn't sleep well for like two months after that. (Laughter) We wonder why Lisa's strange; it's because Paul made her that way. (Laughter)

?But listen, listen, what I wanted you to see today is that the devil is a master deceiver. What he's going to tell that lady finally is, "Hey, you need to find somebody else. You need to take the kids and run." All based on lies. He would love for you to ruin your life and make foolish decisions based on his lies. But I want to tell you that we can overcome. And we're going to be talking about it more. But II Corinthians 10:4, it says that we have weapons also and they are not carnal, they are not natural; they are supernatural weapons also. And it talks about they are mighty through God. And the Bible says that we can pull down these strongholds. You can

do it. You've got to be sober. You've got to be vigilant. You've got to come to church. You've got to study God's word. You've got to live a godly life.

?But it goes on to say that you can cast down imaginations, all these thoughts, imaginations. And it says that you can bring every thought into the captivity of Christ.

?What I wanted you to see today is that you know when these thoughts come, you can cast them down. You have four main weapons and they are powerful weapons. Every one of them is so much more powerful than the enemy.

You have the Word of God. You can get God's word in your heart. When he gives you a thought, you replace that. If it doesn't line up with God's word, you replace that with God's word.

You have the name of Jesus. That's the name every knee's got to bow to. That's a powerful weapon.

You have the power of prayer. You have the power of praise and worship. You can overcome. Everybody say, I can overcome. (I can overcome.) I can pull down strongholds. (I can pull down strongholds.) Devil, you'll have no part of my life, (Devil, you'll have no part of my life,) in the name of Jesus. (in the name of Jesus.)

So I just wanted to encourage you today. Let's just lift our hands and receive God's word. Father, we thank You that we are able to overcome. There is no weapon that is formed against us that will prosper. Father, we will be sober. We will be vigilant. We will put on the whole armor of God. Satan, you will not lie to us. You will not deceive these people, in the name of Jesus. We will guard our mind.

Well y'all are so easy to talk to. And it's a joy for me to share with you. If you'd bow your heads in prayer? And I never like to close the broadcast until we give you an opportunity to give your life to Jesus. You know one of the biggest tragedies is for Satan to blind your mind of really accepting Jesus as your Lord. And it's not something hard to do. All you've got to do is call upon the name of the Lord. And I just want to pray a simple prayer with you. If you'll repeat it after me and mean it, God will change your life.

Just say, Jesus, come into my heart and save me. Be my Lord. Be my Savior. I repent of my old sins, my former sins. God, I'm going to serve You all the days of my life.

Listen, I believe you prayed that prayer. Listen, what you need to do is get in a good church that teaches the Bible. If you can come to Lakewood, we'd love to have you. If you can't come here, go to a church in your neighborhood, one that believes the Bible. Support that church. You know, be a disciple there. Learn the things of God and you'll never regret giving your life to God. He'll do you nothing but good. I'm not saying you're not going to have some challenges. But He will show you how to overcome in every one of them. God bless you. We're so glad you tuned in today and I hope you can come see us some time.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 2"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_002 - 5/23/99

DODIE: We welcome you today to our broadcast. We're so glad that you are watching us and we feel like you're going to be blessed. We know you will, in fact. I want to give this scripture to you. Some people are so concerned about their past sins. And some people have sins that should be concerned about. But when they become a new creature in Christ Jesus, Jesus washes away those sins. And He doesn't remember them any more. And this is in Isaiah; it's the first chapter. It says, "Come, let's talk this over, says the Lord. No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow." How about that? (Applause) Do you know how clean freshly fallen snow is? Of course we don't get that in Houston. But I've seen pictures in Colorado and other places. It is so beautiful on the trees—freshly fallen snow, white as it can be. That's how God will erase your sins and remember them no more. If you're stained as red as crimson. Everybody say, "crimson," would you please? (Crimson) "I can make you white as wool." No matter how many sins you have committed in the past, Jesus can wash them away and make them as white as snow. And the good part about it is that He doesn't remember them any more. So just go on with your life knowing that you've got a God who cares and that His mercy endures forever. And all the people said? Amen. (Amen) (Applause)

JOEL: Let's say it together.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen. (Amen.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Open your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Romans, Chapter 12; Romans, Chapter 12.

We're talking on, "Winning the Battle of the Mind." As I said before, I can't think of a more important subject that the body of Christ needs teaching on than on this subject. The subject of guarding our thought life, guarding our mind. Never underestimate the important role that your mind plays in your walk of faith. Everything starts with a thought.

Your mind is the leader; it's the forerunner of everything you do. And listen to this important statement. You must understand that the only entrance that the enemy has into your personality, into your emotions, into your thoughts is through your mind. And once you really understand that and comprehend that and get a

revelation of that, you'll realize that all you really have to do is close one doorway to the enemy. But it's a very important doorway. It's the doorway to your mind.

See your mind is the bull's eye of Satan's target. That's what he's shooting for. He knows that by affecting the way we think he can hold us captive, in bondage, in prison for a month, for a year, or for a lifetime.

And see it is Satan's goal to set up strongholds in our minds. A stronghold is an erroneous thinking pattern that goes against what God's Word says and it holds you back from being all God wants you to be. And we studied in the last message about how Ephesians 6 talks about we're in this battle; we're in this warfare. Ephesians 6:12 says there's a warfare going on all around us but it's not a physical warfare; it's a warfare in the unseen world. And the devil and demon forces are our enemy. And the main weapon that he uses is lying to us. Simply lying to us.

There's a tremendous battle taking place in our mind. And Ephesians 4:27 says, "give no place to the devil." Don't give him any place in your mind. And Second Corinthians 2:11 says, "we should not be ignorant of the devil's devices." One version says, "Don't be ignorant of the devil's schemes, strategies, and methods."

In other words, if you know how he works, you'll be able to combat him better. In Hosea 4:6, we all know this one, it says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

So I want us to really grasp hold of this truth. It's the truth that'll make us free. And we must understand how the enemy works. He works on our mind.

And I was thinking about I know people and I'm sure you know people too, good Christian people. They go to church. They do their best to live a godly life. But they seem always defeated. Always, you know, always living a miserable life. And you know what it is? They haven't been taught what God has done for them. They haven't been taught their authority in the name of Jesus. Some of them don't even know that we're in a battle. Some of them don't even know that we have an enemy.

And folks, as I said last time, even if you don't know it, if you ignore it, it doesn't go away. You're still in a battle. You've got to put on the armor of God. There's something that we all have to do.

A friend of mine came up to me this week, or actually somebody I've just met, came up to me this week. And he said something to me that illustrated exactly what I was going to talk about this morning. He said, "Joel, I came up during one of your Sunday services and I gave my life to the Lord and you quoted that scripture, 2nd Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he's a new creature. Old things are passed away and all things have become new." But he said, "You know what, Joel, I prayed the sinners prayer but guess what? It didn't work for me, Joel." And I said, "Well why not?" He said, "Well, I don't feel any different, I don't look any different, I don't think any different. I still have the same natural carnal thoughts." He says, "I don't guess I really got saved."

But see that's being destroyed from that lack of knowledge. You've got to realize that when you accept Christ's free gift of salvation, He works on your inner man. Your

inner man is instantly made new to God. It's regenerated; it's made alive to God. But the point is so many people get confused because God doesn't work on our mind when we get saved. He doesn't work on our body; He leaves that up to us.

And he was confused. He thought you know it'd be great if we'd never had another negative thought or we never had another fleshly desire, but that's not the way it works. There's something we have to do.

And that's what I want to stress to you today. Just being born again is not enough. You've got to know the Word of God. And Romans 12, verse 1 and 2, it's a familiar scripture. Why don't we look at it though? It says--Paul was talking--he says, "I beseech you brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service; but be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

There's something there we have to do--be transformed. But first I want to talk about a couple other things that Paul said there, three basic things. He said, "I beseech you." One version says, "I beg you, I urge you, I strongly urge you to live a holy, godly consecrated life."

Let me say this. You will never win a warfare with the enemy if you are not consecrated to God. Obedience is better than sacrifice. I don't want to talk about this point too long. But you ought to have a heart. Paul urges us to live a holy, consistent godly life. And do you know what he says? He says that's a well-pleasing sacrifice to God when you do that.

So, I can't say enough. You can fool a lot of people. You can fool me. You can fool others. But you can't fool God and you can't fool yourself. We ought to desire to live right. That's what the apostle Paul is saying.

The second thing that he said there though--he said, "Do not be conformed to this world." Do not be conformed to this world. When he's talking about the world, what's he talking about? The planet? The earth? No, he's talking about the world system around us. This is real important. Listen, I've heard it described or defined as the world system is the unseen atmosphere around us that continually erodes our faith, it pulls down our hope, and it destroys our love. In other words, it's the society around us that goes against the things of God. That's what he's saying.

Really, in the Bible, a lot of times you can substitute the word "culture" for world. Listen to this: Do not be conformed to this culture. That's what he's saying. And you know, I don't think I'd have to argue with many of you that if you look back over the last 10, 20, 30, 40 years, you can see how this society has taken a downward turn concerning the things of God. Does everybody agree with me? (Amen)

See, the thing is you can turn on network TV tonight and most likely you'll see something on there that you would have never seen 20 years ago. It's because you know the attitude, the morals; the attitude in general is there's an anti-God sentiment. You know we can't pray in schools, and I don't need to belabor the point.

But you know I wonder why all this is happening? Are we not doing good? Or what's going on? No, it's very clear. We talked about it last time. 2nd Corinthians 4:4 says

that Satan is "the god of this world." He is the god of this world system. He's the god of this culture.

So, I think it helps me to understand that behind this society; in general now I'm talking, behind this culture, behind this world system is the evil influence of the prince of darkness himself, Satan.

And see when it says, "Do not be conformed," see that takes on a new meaning. It's because you know there's something evil behind it. You know, what does the word "conform" means? The word "conform" means to assume an outward expression that doesn't come from within. In other words, when you conform to something you feel so much outside pressure influencing you that you begin to change how you act. You don't change who you are. You don't change at all who you are. You just begin to change your actions.

And see when you get born again, if you've got God's Spirit, if you've accepted salvation, then you've got the nature of God on the inside of you, the very nature of God. And you know what? If you're living a holy, godly consecrated life, do you know what fruits your spirit will bear? It will be love, joy, peace, longsuffering. You all know that.

But when you begin to conform to this society or to this world, do you know what you're doing? You're not being true to who you are. You're beginning to mask who you are. Almost like you're acting. I'm being somebody that I'm not. I'm masquerading. When you do that, do you know the fruits that'll begin to come out of your spirit? It's going to be lust, envy, jealousy, greed; just the opposite of the things of God.

And see, the point I wanted to make today, or one point I wanted to make is we must understand that behind this world system, trying to get us to conform, is the prince of darkness himself. The Bible says that Satan was the angel of light in heaven. He was full of wisdom. Listen, he is a master deceiver.

And listen, we're talking about his schemes and strategies. It is the trick of the enemy to get all of us sucked into this world system; get us sucked into this society; get us sucked into this culture just to live an indifferent life. Just, you know, going with the flow, just doing what everybody else does. Kind of having an apathetic kind of attitude where "I don't care"; you know, "whatever happens, happens." And try to get us to live less than our best for God. Because everybody else is doing it, you know we'll do it too.

And listen, that's what the Apostle Paul is saying or God's saying. The Philips translation translated Romans 12:2 this way: It says, "Do not let the world squeeze you into it's own mold." Isn't that good? Have you ever felt the pressure outside trying to squeeze you? That's the force of the enemy trying to squeeze us into its own mold. The Amplified Version says this, "Don't copy the behaviors and customs of this world." You see there's an outside pressure that affects us all that we need to be aware of. It's the trick of the enemy. It's not just some peer pressure. It's the trick of the enemy trying to make us conform.

But listen folks, I want to tell you, every one of you can overcome. You have a choice. The Bible says there's no temptation that you've taken that comes against you that you can't withstand. You can overcome. There is a way of escape.

But you know, sometimes we think of peer pressure. And we know it's real. And I read this story I'll share with you that psychologists did. I read it this week. They wanted to see the effects of how a person reacted when they were surrounded by a greater number of people that obviously stood for what was wrong.

And they took these students, they took 10 at a time and they took them into this classroom. And in this classroom, there was a chart on the wall—a very simple chart. It had three horizontal lines. One line was about 8 inches, one was about 10 inches, and one was about maybe 9 inches. It was very obvious which line was the longest. 100% of you today, if I put the chart up here, you would pick the right answer. If I said, which line is the longest?

Well, what they did with this study, they took 9 of the 10 kids before they went in the room and they told them they were a part of the study. And they said, "Listen, we want you to vote the next to longest line." And they had them all vote publicly. The tenth child that wasn't told to vote that way, when he went into the room, the teacher got up there and explained, "I want you all to vote for the longest line." You all get what I mean?

All the nine students were told to vote for the wrong line. So they went in there and the nine students voted publicly each time. I vote for this line. I vote for this line. And they all voted the next to longest line. But do you know the tenth student in 75% of the cases voted for the wrong line also. And do you know, in a hundred percent of the times when they interviewed the student, they knew which line was the right one. But here's what happened. That's that outside pressure. Do you know what they said? The resounding fact that came out. They said, "We didn't want to be different. We just wanted to go with the flow. We just wanted to follow the majority. We wondered what the other people would think."

And see it's the trick of the enemy on a larger scale in society because society in general has voted for the next to longest line of going against the things of God. It's the trick of the enemy just to get us to conform and just go with the flow and be non-confrontational. And "hey everybody's doing it. Let's just fit in." But we know God's called us to more than that. God's called us out. You know, Ephesians says that God chose us to be in Him before the foundation of the world.

See, you're the salt of the earth. You're the light of the world. First Peter 2:9 says that you are God's chosen people. You are a called-out people. You are God's elect. You should stand tall in the crowd. Stand tall in the crowd. There is a way to overcome.

And I know some of you work amongst ungodly people and you know you feel the pressure. And maybe you go to a social function after work and you know everybody's there. They got a little bit to drink. And maybe there's some drugs going on and maybe there's some unclean language going on. And you may be the only one there. You may feel like a round peg in a square hole. And you know you just think you know just all the pressure just to do what they're doing. But I encourage

you to stand strong and let your light shine. Don't succumb to these outside pressures. (Applause)

See, I've been to a lot of events like that and you know the pressure is so strong. But do you know what I encourage you to do? Share your faith. If you don't share your faith, just--you know a lot of times I say "Look, you know, I've enjoyed being here but I've got to slip out." Sometimes I tell them, "I just got a little emergency, I got to go." You know one guy I was with one time said, "What's the emergency?" I said, "The emergency is the Holy Spirit said 'go now'." (Applause)

But you know you can overcome. The world's watching your actions. If they know you're born again and they should, they're watching to see how you react in certain situations. And if you fall back and just succumb to mediocrity, they're not going to think you have anything to offer. And you know the world's looking for something. The world's looking for something that we have, the Good News.

And you know I was thinking about--I play a lot of basketball. And about 10 years ago for 2 or 3 years, I played at this certain gym--not where I play now. I got a bunch of good guys there now. But I played there and I never felt like I fit in. They were good people; they were good friends. But you know every time after the games they went to party. They went to do some things and I just determined you know I wasn't going to fit into that. I wasn't going to be molded into what they wanted to make me. And I always felt like they probably kind of made fun of me and all that.

And you know, as I've said before, living the Christian life is the most fulfilled fun life you're ever going to live. You don't have to be an old prune. (Applause) You don't have to be an old fuddy-dud. We have fun. Our family has fun. We laugh. We play. We jump on Gary's trampoline. We do a lot of fun things.

But you know what? I just told you before, I don't need and you don't need the, you know, the drugs and alcohol and illicit living to have a good time. And that's what I always told these guys.

But you know, what's funny is over a period of time. The point I wanted to make, is over a period of a couple of years--you know what, one of the guys that was least likely, he came up and gave me a name. His mom's name and he asked me to turn it into our prayer group. And you know I thought that was so unusual. Hearing the word "prayer" come out of this guy's mouth was a miracle in itself.

But you know what? Over a time they began to respect, they began to come to me for answers. They began to come to me for prayer. And you know that's what happens if you will live your life like God's chosen, like God's elect, you'll stand out amongst the crowd.

And I know some of you young people, you know the peer pressure is real. And I know some of you, you say "Joel, you know I go to these parties and everybody's smoking crack cocaine and you know everybody's doing it, Joel." But listen, you know, you're not everybody. You're God's called out ones. You're God's elect ones. (Applause)

And you know the trick of the enemy is saying, "Everybody's doing it. What will people think of me? They'll think I'm odd." But folks, we need to realize we are in the world; we're not of the world. The world's never going to accept us. We need to quit worrying about what other people will think and start being more concerned about what God thinks. (Applause)

You know I think about my dad. If there was one that didn't conform to this world, it was daddy. I'm telling you he would embarrass us kids out in public. He knew no shame, daddy. But I know you know the story when he took Paul to that Astros ball game one time. Thank God I was too little to go. They went to the Astros and there were a couple of guys sitting behind my dad and my brother Paul and one of the Astros made an error. And they stood up behind them. They had a few beers to drink. And they stood up behind my dad and they started cursing those players. "You blankety-blank player, can't you play any better than that?"

And daddy, when he shared his faith-- let me tell you this, you don't have to be obnoxious. You don't have to be you know, you don't have to turn around and tell them about you know "Have you heard about the eternal place of punishment where you're going to burn forever?" You've got good news to share. Good news you know. People already think God's out to get them. You need to tell them their sins are already forgiven. God's not out to get you. He's got His arms held open wide.

But daddy turned around, you know. He's a happy go lucky guy. He turned around and said, "Fellows listen, the name of the Lord is to be praised, not to be cursed." And of course they looked at daddy like his elevator didn't go all the way up. (Laughter) And they sat back down. And they had a few more beers. But a couple innings later, you all have heard it, one of the Astros hit a home run and those two guys stood up and gave each other a high five and said, "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord." (Applause) Then they slapped my dad on the back, y'all remember, and they said, "How's that, preacher?"

But you know we shouldn't be conformed. And you know I was thinking about one time--you heard him tell it--he chased somebody around town for 15 minutes because they had a bumper sticker on his car he didn't like.

But you know what you've got to realize folks that in general this world system, the culture of this world, goes against the things of God. When you think about it, the world says, "Get, get, get, get everything you can get." You know what God says? "It is better to give than to receive. It's better to give than to receive," just the opposite. The world says you know, "Climb the corporate ladder, step on your friends, win the rat race, crush your enemies, do everything you can do to get to the top." God says, you know, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." The world says, "Make a name for yourself, become famous, do everything you can to become known." God says if you want to be great, you've got to become the least of all. See it's totally against the things of God.

You know really, this society put so much emphasis on money. The whole world revolves around money. If you've got a lot of money, if you drive a nice car, if you've got a nice house, if you wear nice clothes, if you got a lot of material possessions, then you must be important. You must be rich. See that's not what God says. The Apostle Paul says, "I count all the things that I've gained in this life as mere rubbish, as nothing, as compared to the priceless gift of knowing Christ."

And this suit doesn't make me. You know I'm all for you having great things. Money's not the problem; it's the love of money. You know, God's blessed me with a beautiful house, and a beautiful car that I got when my dad passed away, and a beautiful suit—at least I like it anyway. (Laughter) But you know, this suit and these possessions, they don't make us who we are.

Don't get caught up into that rat race. That's not who you are. Who you are is determined you know by the integrity of your character. It's so much more important. Jesus looks right through these superficial things. (Applause)

But let me go on. Let's don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The word "conformed" we talked about is to assume an outward expression that doesn't come from within. "Transform" is exactly the opposite. It means to assume an outward expression that does come from within. You know, we get our word transform from the Greek word, "metamorpho." We get our English word "metamorphous" from that. And you all know what a metamorphous is--it's a radical change. You think about when a little tadpole metamorphoses into a frog; there's been a radical change.

Do you know when God touches our inner man, when we receive salvation, there's a radical change. There's a transformation takes place on the inside of us like we talked about a while ago. Well, the Bible talks about that there needs to be a radical change, a transformation needs to take place in our mind.

Remember God leaves the business of the mind up to us. And the Bible says that the carnal mind in itself is the enemy of God. So, the Bible says we've got to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. How does that transformation—How does this radical change take place in our minds? Does it come from singing? From fasting? From praying? No. It comes I believe from meditating on God's word. Meditating on God's word.

Folks, I can't over emphasize the importance of getting the scriptures out of the pages of the Bible and getting them first into your mind. And once you get them into your mind long enough, they're going to digest down into your spirit. You can get to a place where your mind will line up with your spirit. Otherwise, your mind is always fighting against the things of God. And the Bible says there's got to be this radical change take place.

And what does "meditate" mean? I'm not talking about going out and sitting out in the field with your legs crossed and you know wearing your pajamas. I'm not talking about meditating like that. I'm talking about meditate means to ponder, to imagine, to say the same things over and over and over again.

So what I'm saying is we've got to get God's word. Get a scripture that concerns your situation this week. I challenge you to do it this week and meditate on it. In other words, think about it during the week. Think about it. Maybe put it up on your dashboard or put it on your mirror at home; put it on your computer screen. You don't have to say it out loud. It's all taking place in your mind. What you're doing you're imagining the scripture. You're renewing your mind.

You see, I've told you before--maybe this will explain it a little better. But when I was building the TV station, a couple years ago, Channel 55, we were putting the TV

station on the air. I had a lot of negative thoughts and comments. And there was a big chance that it wouldn't work; that it would fail. And I found a bunch of scriptures. But there are a couple of them that I got that I just meditated on them every time I could think about it.

You see the best defense is a good offense. If you fill your mind with God's word, when the enemy comes, there's not going to be any room for him. And I got this scripture, Proverbs 3:6 in the Living Bible; it says: "In everything you do, if you put God first, he will direct and crown your efforts with success."

And do you know what I did, I would just continually from the time I got up I would just be thinking about that. God, I thank you, you are first in my life; you are crowning, you're directing my efforts with success. And when there would be obstacles that would come against me, when people would say things, you know they'd say something negative. You know what, instantly that scripture would come to mind: "No, God's crowning and directing my efforts with success." Do you know what was happening? I was getting a renewed mind in that area. See, it's so important. There was another scripture. I was making a lot of decisions.

In Proverbs 2 it says, "The Lord grants wisdom; He is your shield, guarding and protecting your pathway. He will cause you to make the right decision every time."

And you know I'd just meditate on that. God, you are guarding my pathway. You are shielding my pathway. You are leading me in the right way. You will cause me to make the right decision every time.

See, it's not enough just to come here and hear this once on Sunday. You need to get it out of the pages of the Bible, get it into your mind. Your mind will start to line up with the Word of God.

You see I've met people and I'm sure you have too. And I don't fault them, but I've met them right down here and they say, "Joel, I'm having such a hard time." They're sincere as can be. They say, "I'm having such a hard time. You know the enemy is really after me. It doesn't look like I'm going to make it you know." And so on and so forth. You know what? They've already lost the battle in their mind. They've already lost the battle right up here. You know I pray for them but I encourage them to get in the Bible and get God's scriptures in your heart. I'm not saying deny the circumstances. You can come up and say, "Joel, I'm having a hard time, I'm really challenged. But you know what, Greater is He that's in me than he that's in the world. I can overcome. God's made a way for me to escape." (Applause)

See, you don't have to deny that. But I encourage you today—I'm out of time—but don't be conformed to this world. You feel all these outside pressures, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. How does a radical change take place? God leaves it up to us. We got to get God's Word in our mind. Not just study it. Let's meditate on it. Let's ponder it. Let's imagine it. Then it will become real. One day it'll drop right down into our spirit and we will be so renewed there's nothing the enemy can't tell you; you know, nothing. He won't have a foothold in your life. None whatsoever.

Listen to Joshua 1:8. I'll close with this. "This book of the law," the bible, "shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night. For then you

will make your way prosperous"- God won't, you will- "you shall deal wisely and you shall have good success."

It's when you mediate on God's word. Let me read one more I wrote down here.

"Blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law does he meditate day and night." See, you're meditating, you're thinking about it, you're imagining. "You shall be like a tree firmly planted by the streams of water which will yield forth your fruit. Your leaf will not wither and everything you do, everything you put your hands to do is going to prosper."

Isn't that good news? Amen. (Applause)

If you will, bow your heads in prayer. Let me just talk to those of you that are viewing by television just for a moment. I always like to give you the opportunity to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you've never made a profession of faith, then you need to do it today. The bible says, "Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

It's not hard. You just have to pray a simple prayer and mean it. Just say, Oh God, come into my heart. Jesus be my Lord, be my Savior. I'll serve You all the days of my life.

Listen, if you prayed that simple prayer, if you mean it, you ought to get into a good Bible based church. If you can, we'd love to have you come out here to Lakewood and be a part of this great family of God. But if you can't, go to another church and get in there and be discipled and learn the things of God. Well, like I said, if you can come out here be sure and join us next week and join us in person if you can. We're so glad you tuned in today. And God bless you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 3"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_003 - 5/30/99

DODIE: We welcome you to our broadcast today. We are so glad that you've joined us. And I believe you're going to be blessed because you have a receptive heart or you never would have turned on our broadcast to begin with. So we welcome you to the broadcast. I'm reading to you out of the Living Bible in Proverbs 19. "Stop listening to teaching that contradicts what you know is right." Is that powerful? If you are going some place or you're listening to something or whatever that says that Jesus has changed, that He doesn't still do miracles, then you're contradicting what you know is right. If you're listening to people that say signs and wonders are not for today, that Jesus doesn't still save today, then that's contradicting what you know is right in your heart. So I want to encourage you to get in a good church that teaches the word of God and then you'll be happy and you'll be fulfilled and you'll be pleasing Jesus. And all the people said? (Amen.) (Applause)

JOEL: Mom always does good. We are so glad to have you here. I'm honored and it's my pleasure to be able to share with you. I love coming to Lakewood. Lakewood's a great place. Isn't it? (Amen.) I brag about you guys all the time. You know you look around and you see all the different races, you think, "Man, this is what heaven is going to be like." And we want to invite everybody to bring your friends and family back. And those of you watching, we invite you to come you know. People ask me all the time, "What denomination are y'all, Joel?" Well we're no denomination; we're everything. You know we've got Baptists, Catholics, Methodists or people in here that have never been to church. We've got a few heathens in here that we're going to get this afternoon. (Laughter) Now listen, I encourage you, just come as you are. Come as you are. You don't have to wear a suit. You can wear a suit, but if you're more comfortable in blue jeans, that's fine. I'll guarantee you this: we will accept you just as you are. Let's give the Lord a handclap. (Applause)

I was talking to Brother Schambach one time. You know how funny he is. If y'all don't know him, he's a minister that has a tent and he travels around the country still. And he was in the Bronx, New York one time and he told me he had this big tent, had about 5,000 people in it. He was down front and he was praying over somebody and he said, "Joel, there's this big commotion over to the right. And I looked up and everybody was hollering and screaming. And I saw this guy with his hands up and he was running through the crowd screaming, running as fast as he could." And he said, "I thought for sure this guy, you know surely he got his miracle. But he was coming right up toward the platform, but," he said, "or toward the altar." And he said, "The closer he got the more I realized what they were screaming about. All that he was wearing was his tennis shoes." I said, "Did you pray for him?" He said, "No, he just ran right by me and ran right outside the other side of the tent." But listen, you can come to Lakewood, just wear more than your birthday suit. (Laughter)

Let's hold up our bibles. Say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the

Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: Amen. God bless you. Open your bibles to Isaiah, chapter 26 please, Isaiah 26. Right after Psalms. We've been talking about the last several weeks, "Winning the Battle of the Mind." How many of y'all are enjoying this? (Amen.) Amen. I hope so. I'm learning from it even as I study it.

But it's so important that we guard our thought life, guard our mind. The book of Ephesians tells us, chapter 6, verse 12 that we're in a warfare, that there's a battle going on all around us, but it's not a physical battle. It's not a battle that we can see with our own eyes; it's in the spiritual world. It's really in the mental world.

And we need to realize that the mind is a priceless gift that God has given each of us. Do y'all realize that? God could have made us robots. He could have made us like drones where we just went around with no will of our own. But God didn't do that. He didn't choose to do that. He gave us all the power to make our own choices. He gave us all a will of our own. He gave us a mind so that we could be creatures of choice.

And how we ought to guard our mind and take care of our mind. I know growing up sometimes my parents questioned whether my mind was really working or not—some of the decisions I made. But we ought to guard our mind, take care of our minds.

You know computer experts, they can make some pretty powerful computers that calculate some large numbers, maybe faster than the human mind. They can make some computers that have tremendous memory, that can—you know you can put every name of every American in it with their phone numbers. And they can call it up in an instant. But you know what? I've never seen a computer that can reason like the human mind.

The Bible says that we are wonderfully and precisely made. Your human mind is an incredible thing that we shouldn't take for granted. I've never seen a robot that can drive a car on the will of it's own. I've never seen a robot or a computer program where it could love God or worship God or fall in love. No, God made us unique and we should take care of it. Take care of and guard this precious gift that He gave us. And don't take it for granted.

In the book of Isaiah, chapter 26, I want to just talk about a real simple scripture. Look at verse 3 there. It says, "If you will keep your mind stayed on Me, I will keep you in perfect peace." I will keep you in perfect peace if you keep your mind stayed on Me. Very simple scripture, yet so profound, folks.

You know let's talk about peace for a minute. Everybody in the world is looking for peace. People are trying to buy peace with their money. Some people are trying to get peace from fame and fortune. Some people are trying to, you know, change

relationships, get rid of their wife or husband. They say, "Then I'll have peace." But listen folks. Let me—Rivers. He said, "What?" Listen; let me get it real clear up front. The only way to have true peace and happiness is to have a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. You will never wage a successful warfare against the enemy in your mind unless you have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the basis of Christianity.

You see He is the only one that can fill the void that's deep down inside of every one of you. And I know some people, they tell me, "Joel, but I've got a lot of money. You don't know how much money I have. I'm going to go out and buy me a new Ferrari this week and that's going to give me peace and happiness." But no, folks; that's temporary pleasure. That will give you a little pleasure. But in a couple of months you'll be right back to where you were.

You know some people say, "I'm going to go, Joel, to the hills of Montana and buy me a house and I'm going to watch the sun come up and the sun go down. I'm going to get out of this rat race and then I'm going to have true tranquillity and true peace." But you know what? That's not going to do it, folks. That's going to give you some temporary pleasure.

Some of you, like I said, you want to change relationships and that will give you peace. But listen folks, getting rid of your wife or husband or having an adulterous relationship, that might give you some pleasure. The Bible says, "The pleasures of sin are for a season." It might give you a little pleasure, but it's not going to give you lasting peace. You've got to have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. (Applause)

You see, pleasure is temporary; peace with God is everlasting. It gives us a hope of everlasting life. It fills the void deep down on the inside of us. It lets us lay down at night and have sweet sleep because we have peace with God. We know where we're going.

But you know folks, this scripture says that God will keep us in perfect peace. Now think about this. I believe there's a difference between having perfect peace and experiencing just God's peace. You see from the time that I was a little boy, 4 years old, I made that personal encounter with Jesus Christ. I made that decision. I've been raised in this Christian family. You know I'm a preacher's kid. I've gone to church 3 times a week. I've been raised in this Christian environment. My dad, later years, he became a famous pastor, man. Everywhere I went, people knew his name. I told you before that you know when I'd get pulled over by a policeman. The policeman would look at my driver's license. He'd say, "you related to that Osteen man, that preacher?" And I'd say yea. He'd always let me go. (Laughter) You know, you know. I have a lot of favor because of Daddy's name.

You know it's funny because Daddy, he's—I'll tell you a little quark about him. He in the last couple of cars that he bought, they had a built in radar detector. And Daddy loved that. But listen, Daddy didn't speed. Daddy could never speed. In Daddy's later years he touched his accelerator, he touched the brake as much as he would touch the accelerator. (Laughter) I'm telling you, when I rode with Daddy, my poor neck. I'd have to come down here for prayer. (Laughter)

But Dad--(Laughter)--but Daddy--Listen to this. Daddy, he loved that radar detector. He loved little quarks and it would make his day if I was riding with him, if that radar detector would go off and there would be a cop over the hill. He'd say, "Look at this, Joel. Look at this. It's going to be one there." And sure enough, if it went over he was so excited about that. (Laughter) And you know what funny? He said, "Look at that, Joel. Praise God it saved me again." I said, "Daddy, you were going 55 before and now you're going 55." (Laughter) But Daddy was so funny when--he used to encourage me to get one of these radar detectors. I said, "Daddy, I don't need that. I just use your name when they pull me over." (Laughter) I said I do that. And if I ever come over here and there's a policeman, if I'm going 70 I get down to 55 as quick as I can. I put on my brakes. I make sure I get there. And all my friends kid me that the policeman will see that I'm guilty. But you know what? I'd rather be showing that I'm quick to repent, you know. (Laughter)

Between that and having my dad's name only one time I got a ticket. And this one guy, man, I tried everything I could on him. I told him about Lakewood Church. I told him about John Osteen. He knew nothing of that. I finally said, "You ever heard of the Holy Bible, man?" (Laughter) Anyway, my dad, he had some funny quarks.

But I was raised in this Christian environment, you know. Everything I did was you know concerning the things of God. And I had this unmistakable, undeniable peace inside of my heart like you do, if you're born again. But listen to this, folks. Do you know there were times in my life that I did not experience God's perfect peace? There have been times in my life where I've been confused; I've been worried; I've been anxious about the future. And I know some of you say, "Oh Joel, don't say that." But listen. We're not up here because we're better than you, because we don't have any human emotions. All of us, if you will be honest about it, there's been times in your life you felt these same things. You've been anxious, you've been concerned, you've been worried. Some of you today, you're probably facing some of those same things.

And you know I was thinking about, what is that? Why does that happen if we have peace with God? But what it is folks, I believe is that the peace of God, being born again it gives us the hope of salvation, it gives us the hope of heaven. But you know what? We're not in heaven now. We're not in the sweet by-and-by like Daddy used to say. We're in the nasty now-and-now where we have problems, where we have challenges and all that

And God is saying here that if we keep our mind stayed on Him, He will give us perfect peace. See there is perfect peace that we can experience that is here for this life. And God said here's how you're going to have to get it. He said, "I'll give you this perfect peace." He said, "I'll give it to you under one condition, under one simple condition." But it's something that you absolutely, necessarily have to do. You have to do this to experience God's perfect peace. He said I'll do it if you keep your minds stayed on Me. See how important that is, folks. Keep your mind stayed on Christ. God works on our spirit--when we get born again, God works on our spirit man. He doesn't work on our mind. There's something that we have to do. It's so important. I've said before, never underestimate the important role that your mind plays in your walk of faith.

You see so many times in Full Gospel circles we've been taught about faith. We've been taught so much about faith. And I'm a big believer in faith, y'all. I believe in

faith. You can't get saved without faith. You can't please God without faith. But folks, let's don't underestimate the important role that our mind plays. If we don't renew our mind and if we don't address this issue of our mind, then our mind will hinder our faith. The Bible says that your natural mind is the enemy of God. There's something that you have to do, folks, something that we have to do. We have to keep our mind stayed on Christ. And I know some of you say, "Joel, I'm busy. I've got a career and I'm working and I've got all this stuff going on." But folks, it is not going to happen automatically. You're not going to experience God's perfect peace automatically. You have to make a choice. We are creatures of choice.

And we talked about last week, one of the best ways to keep your mind stayed on God is get the scriptures out of the Bible and get them into your mind. This Bible won't do you any good on a shelf. It won't do you any good just alone reading it. You need to get it into your mind and meditate on the Word of God. You know what "meditate" means? It means to ponder, to imagine, to say the same things over and over again. And folks, you can get to a point where your mind will line up with your spirit and it will not disagree. And I challenge you and I challenged you last week to get God's word into your mind. Begin to meditate on it. Then it will drop down into your spirit.

Sometimes I like to take a scripture that just talks about the goodness of God, how good God is. Like Galatians 3:13, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law." You know what the curse of the Law is? It's misery, sickness, mental torment, depression. It's all the miserable things of this life. You take that scripture one week and just meditate on that, think about that, ponder that. Thank you, Father, that I don't have to live a miserable life. Listen folks, you're going to have the perfect peace of God because your mind is stayed on Him. That's going to please God.

You see I found in my own life that every time I get worried, confused, concerned or overly concerned, anxious about the future, you know what's happened? I've taken my mind off the things of God and I've started looking at the circumstances all around me. You know I'm going against what God says and I start dwelling on how am I going to overcome these challenges. How am I going to overcome these obstacles? How am I going to overcome all these things that are coming against me? And you know what happens when you dwell on those? Satan's a master deceiver. He will be sure they get magnified in your life. They'll get bigger and bigger and bigger. And then all the sudden you know what? You're feeling doubt and unbelief and fear. And you know what that is? It's just the opposite of faith. And folks, if you're operating like that or if you're feeling those fears, you just need to imagine that you're taking God's hands and you're tying His hands, tying them up where He can't operate in your life. You're stopping the flow of God's blessings. You're stopping the flow of God's power. You're stopping the flow of God's perfect peace from coming into your life.

And let me say this to you today. And I'll say it all compassion and in all sincerity. If you are worried, if you are fearful, if you are doubtful, if you are full of anxiety, those are choices that you have made. We are creatures of choice. Don't let anybody tell you that they just came from somewhere. No, you chose that. You chose to be fearful. You choose to be worried. You choose to be full of fear. You've got to realize that.

And what we're saying in effect and none of us would want to say that, but when you're doing that you know what you're saying? You're saying, "God, I know You created the whole world. God, I know there's nothing too hard for You. God, I know You flung the stars into space. But God, in this particular situation, in this particular instance I'm not sure, God, that You have enough power. God, I'm not sure You have enough might. God, I'm not sure You have enough ability. God, I'm not sure You're really in control. And see, none of us would say that, but that's what we're doing. We're choosing to have that kind of attitude.

And you know what worry is, folks? It's just meditating on what the enemy says. It's just playing his thoughts over and over and over and over again. See Satan knows the power of the mind. If he can tie our mind up for months or for years, we'll never be everything God wants us to be. And when you worry, you're doing just the opposite of you know meditate on God's Word because your mind's going to be renewed. When you worry, you're meditating on what the enemy says and I guarantee you, it will lead to doubt and fear and unbelief and insecurity. See you've got to choose not to worry. You've got to choose not to worry. You've got to keep your mind. It's a choice. I've got to keep my mind stayed on Him, then I'm going to feel His perfect peace.

And I know some of you today say, "Joel, you don't think I can go through this life without being worried?" Well listen, there's a difference between being worried and being concerned. There's a difference here. It's an important difference. See Philippians 4:6 said, "Don't worry about anything; pray about everything." Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. Listen, I going to challenge you. The next time you have the opportunity to worry, do me a favor, promise to do something for me, don't choose to worry. Choose not to worry, but pray about that situation. Get you a believer. Join hands in agreement—Amen. That's good. (Applause) Get somebody to agree with you and then thank God that the answer's on the way. And every time that you have--that--that negative thought comes against you, folks—we're in a warfare. The thoughts are going to keep coming. They're going to keep coming. They're going to keep coming. I don't care how renewed your mind is; they're going to come. But every time those negative thoughts come, you know what? Just praise God that the answer's on the way. Choose not to worry. You know what you're doing? You're saying, "God, I know the situation may not look good, but I choose to believe You're still on the throne. I choose to believe You can still see me through." And you're going to experience God's perfect peace. (Applause)

You know when my dad got sick last year, really you know, some people say, "Well, I didn't think your dad was sick." He didn't look that sick. But he just didn't feel good. He was in kidney failure from years and years of being on—having high blood pressure. And when your kidneys don't work, they don't purify your blood. And if you don't have pure blood, you don't feel good. And he preached many times when he didn't feel well. But in November or October 31st of last year, 1998, Daddy went on dialysis and dialysis is where you have a man-made kidney. You've got to go to a clinic and have it done 3 times a week or so. And you know that was a very traumatic time in my life. You see I love my dad. Y'all know that. I spent 17 years working here with him. We traveled all around the world. I've been in 30 countries with him. We had a great relationship. But all of a sudden when he went on dialysis you know it was very traumatic because you know that really he couldn't travel any more like he wanted to. And you know I had plenty of opportunities back there to

worry. I had plenty of opportunities to worry because I thought, "Man, you know what about the future?" But you know what? I made a conscientious effort. I said, "God, I am not going to worry about this situation. I am very concerned about this situation. I'm going to pray about this situation." It's the worst thing I've ever faced most likely. But you know what? When you pray about it, when you trust God, when you keep your mind stayed on Him—all through that time, folks, I was not worried one bit. And you know what? I felt God's perfect peace as never before. Even in Daddy's death I felt God's perfect peace. You know in the darkest time of my life by keeping my mind on the things of God, by refusing not to worry, by refusing not to listen to the enemy. You know every time I had the change to worry, I'd just lift my hands and say, "Father, you are still on the throne. Your Son is still seated at the right hand of the Father." (Applause)

See but I want to emphasis, folks, it's choices. God didn't make us robots. You've got to choose. I could have gone all to pieces. Here's the man I love that unfortunately died. But you know what? God saw us through in our darkest hour. I'm sure my whole family felt that perfect peace too. But it's because we chose to keep our mind on the things of God. You know God's kind of—God knows what's best for us because many times I thought about, "You know if Daddy dies, who's going to speak up here?" (Laughter) And I know God knew better than to tell me because I don't care how convincing this message is today, I would have been worried. (Laughter) God, leave me in my ignorance sometimes. (Laughter)

Victoria and I were talking this week about how much our lives had changed over the last 5 or 6 months. You know you've just got to be open to God, you've got to be willing, you've got to be—you know you've got to say, "God, not my will but Yours." He leads you one step at a time. You know just be open. My life, this is never anything I dreamed of. But I showed you the cartoon the other night. It said, somebody gave it to me, it said, "If you really want to make God laugh, show Him your plans." (Laughter)

But listen, worrying, folks, is meditating on what the enemy says. It's so important to keep our mind stayed on Him. We can't have a positive, Christian, overcoming life with a negative, worried, fearful mind. And the enemy is going to use every opportunity he can to get you to worry. Every chance he can.

I know it's probably happened to you, but I've been sitting at home before and I hear a siren go by. And you the first thought that comes to my mind? Man, that's your wife and kids. They've had a terrible accident. You know did that happen to y'all too? You know those thoughts come to your mind and the first thing I do is I go pick up the phone to try to call Victoria on her portable cell phone. But I don't know if your wife's like mine, but her line is always busy or the battery's dead. (Laughter) But you know if you give in to those thoughts, if it's busy you know what he'll tell you? Man, they had an accident. She's calling 911. He begins to show you all the trauma that's taking place. You know he tells you your child's pinned in there. You know people, you can live in mental torment if you let it. And all of the sudden you listen to all these lies that the enemy gives you and before long you're in a frenzy. You're in a panic and you've lost your perfect peace, all because you're listening to what the enemy says.

And folks, if the enemy knows he can keep us tied up in little things, worrying about something that's an hour away or a day away—let me tell you the trick of the enemy.

He is a master deceiver. What he's going to do eventually, he's going to say, "Hey man, these guys will worry about anything. Let's give them something that's 10 years away and let them worry about that. We'll just tie their mind up from now 'til 10 years. We don't even have to worry about them. They'll never be all God wants them to be." You see how the enemy works? He is a master deceiver, if you bit off on to it.

Man, I'm telling you one time when Victoria and I first got married we lived in a townhouse. It's kind of humorous to me and it made me look foolish. But we lived in this townhouse and I drove home one day and my remote control opener for my garage would not work. I think my battery was dead. So I had to walk up to the front of the house and I didn't have a front door key for some reason that day. And as I walked up to the front door I could hear some sounds. It sounded like somebody was hitting something. It sounded like I heard some scraping sounds, some weird noises inside. And I knew Victoria was home. And this is in the days before I had a cell phone. And so I went to the front door and I knocked on the front door and I heard those sounds and nobody answered the door. I rang the doorbell a couple of times, nobody. Victoria wouldn't answer. And you know what? A distinct thought came to my mind, a distinctly negative thought.

You know what? We ought to start to recognize the voice of the enemy. Do you know if you have a distinctly negative thought—you know you just didn't think it up. No, the enemy sent that. You need to choose to cast it down, choose not to dwell on it. You just didn't make it up on your own. We're in a spiritual warfare, folks. He's always shooting things out at us.

But this distinct thought came to my mind and it was negative. You know what it said? It said, "Somebody has followed your wife home. They've some how gotten in there. They've got her tied up and they're harming her. They're assaulting her. Those blows you're hearing are against your wife." And you know what? I stepped back and I thought for about 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 seconds. And all of a sudden, I could feel myself break out into a sweat. My emotions were changed by one thought. I bit into it hook, line, and sinker. I beat on the door stronger. And you know I said, "Victoria, you know open up the door." I couldn't get her so I ran around the back of the house. And I looked in the windows. I tried to get in a window. You know I was in a frenzy. I was panicked. And I ran around the side of the house and then finally came back to the garage door, finally found this big log and I was just going to go through that front door some how. (Laughter) It sounds funny, but it shows you how foolish I was. But I had that—I mean I was in a panic. It all happened in 30 seconds. I had lost God's perfect peace. I went up to the door and then Victoria just opened the door and said you know, "What's going on, Joel? What do you have that log for?" (Laughter) I said, "Victoria, where have you been? You know how..." And she said, "I've been upstairs moving furniture and hanging some picture on the wall." (Laughter) I said, "You know how many gray hairs were just birthed in my scalp?"

But you know it's funny, but you know that's the way the enemy works. I lost my perfect peace over a little simple thing. And if you take that and magnify it by something that's much, much larger than that, then you're going to live your life in a frenzy.

You know I was thinking about, just this week we had another interesting thing happen. April called me. They're not here today. But she asked me if my son

Jonathan, my 4 year old, could go swimming with Garrison in the pool. And I said you know, "Of course. As long as he wears his floatation devices." He wears these little orange floaties--you've all seen them--because he doesn't swim fluently yet. And so 10 or 15 minutes later you know what? Well, let me tell you this first. Jonathan and I, we swim a lot. And one time when we were swimming he jumped off the wall to me and he jumped in there and he usually goes under. But one of his little floatation devices popped off. Only one time I'd ever seen that happen.

Well, I was driving home from church this week and April just called maybe 15, 20 minutes later. And I had this other distinctly negative thought. You know what the enemy did? He said, "Your son's floatation device has just popped off his arm." And you know what he did? He began to replay that into my mind. See Satan gets you at your most insecure moment. You've got to recognize it's the voice of the enemy. He said, "It's fallen off. He's under the water right now, Joel. He can't breathe and April has turned around and she's tending to her little baby, and Gary's over here. And they can't see him and he's about to drown." You know what would have happened in the past? I would have grabbed my cell phone. I would have made a be-line to that pool. I would have done something. But you know what? This time I recognized. No Satan, you're a liar. You're the father of all lies. You see--(Applause) You see I chose not to give into that. I said, "No Satan, Psalm 91 says God will give His angels charge over us to bear us up in their hands lest we even dash our foot against a stone, much less drown in a swimming pool. With long life He'll satisfy us." See it's what you choose to meditate on, what you choose. And you know what? This time I didn't loose my joy. I just put that phone down.

And you know what? Most of the things we worry about never, never, ever come to pass. And I just encourage you today folks, to don't give in to worry. It is a choice that you're making. We are creatures of choice. And some of you, you know, you're worried about--you know you say, "Joel," and I sympathize with you. "But Joel, man, I come from a bad childhood." And, "Joel, my husband left me." And, "Joel, you know I went bankrupt." Or, "Joel, you know my wife left," all these things. But listen folks; don't let your past keep your back from being what God wants you to be in the future. You've got to choose.

The Bible says in Matthew 6, it says, "Which of you by worrying," Jesus said this, "can add one cubit, can add one inch to your stature?" None of you can do it. All this stuff we worry about, it doesn't change a thing. Jesus went on to say, "Don't worry about what you're going to eat, what you're going to drink, what you're going to wear." He said instead, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you." In other words, you're going to have everything you need. Seek first the kingdom of God. What does that mean? Keep your mind stayed on Christ. Keep your mind stayed on the things of God. Then you're going to experience His perfect peace.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? And I'd like to just speak to those who are watching on television just a moment. I never like to leave before giving you the opportunity to have that personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest decision you could ever make, folks. All you've got to do is pray a simple prayer. The bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Just pray this prayer. Say, Jesus, come into my heart. Be my Lord. Be my Savior. Jesus, I want to serve You all the days of my life. And I give my life to You.

Listen, I believe if you prayed that simple prayer you ought to get in a good church. Be disciplined. If you can, come out here to Lakewood. We will love you. We will teach you how to live a victorious Christian life. We're not the only good church. There are many of them. Just get in one that teaches the Bible. And we're so glad you've joined us today. So glad you tuned in. I hope you can come out and see us in person some time. God bless you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 4"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_004 - 6/6/99

Song: At Lakewood Church we're here for you.

DODIE: We greet you today and we're so glad you've joined us by television. And I have a scripture that I want to give to you and it's good. All God's word is good. But this is in Isaiah 41. I usually read another part that goes with it, but I'm just going to leave you with this. "I am holding you by your right hand." How about that? Right hand; everybody wave your right hand. God is holding us by our right hand. "I the Lord your God, and I say to you do not be afraid. I am here to help you." Praise the Lord. He's holding your hand when you get afraid. Hold your hand up and say, "Here Jesus. Here's my hand." I'm not going to be afraid any more because you are my strength and you are my help. Remember God is holding your right hand. Aren't you thankful? Give Jesus a handclap, would you please? (Applause)

JOEL: My mom's great. Isn't she? (Yes.) I was thinking of something funny about my mom. The—she says Oh my. Well she aggs me on. She told Mayor Brown back there, she said, "Mayor, I don't condone everything Joel says out there." She said, "I'm going to put a disclaimer." But I've got to tell you one of my favorite things over the last 3 months, being able to stand up here and speak to you, is to watch my mom sitting down there on the front row. I keep my mom on pins and needles. (Laughter) She never knows what I'm going to say. And I can't tell you how many times I've looked down there and I told a story and Momma's got her face buried in her hand. I know she's just thinking, "That boy's embarrassing the family name." (Laughter) And that time I told about my brother holding me down and his drooling into my mouth, (Laughter) listen; I looked down there, I thought I was going to have to call 911. (Laughter) Momma was contorting and squirming and I thought, "That serves her right" because growing up, she had to keep all of us kids in line in church. And she always told us, "Joel, be quiet and be still." The two things kids hate to do. We didn't have children's church over there. Momma had a way and April will tell you, every mom does I guess. But she'll turn and look at you and you knew that you were in trouble. April used to tell me, "Joel, Momma's giving you the evil eye." (Laughter) But I knew if the evil eye didn't work, Momma had another weapon and it was this right arm right here. And she used to take that and squeeze my biceps so hard; she'd get these fingernails in it. And you know Daddy was up there preaching; we couldn't scream. That's what we wanted to do. We just had to sit there and squirm. And I thought, you know how the Bible says you reap what you sow? (Laughter) Well now days I look down there when I'm up here and she's squirming just like I used to squirm. (Laughter)

But we are so glad to have all of you here. And glad to have Mayor Brown here. Mayor Brown has honored our family so much. When my dad passed away in January, I'll never forget how he dismissed City Council early one day so that he and all the council members could come and be a part of the Memorial Service. And so Mayor Brown and the whole city have honored us so much. We appreciate that. (Applause)

Let's stand together and we're going to study our Bible today. So glad to have all of you here. Let's say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen. (Amen.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Open your bibles please to the book of II Corinthians, chapter 4. We've been talking about the last several weeks on, "Winning the Battle of the Mind." And I've been stressing to you the importance of guarding your thought-life, guarding your mind. I realize that we are a spirit-being, but if we don't address and get to know more about the roll that our mind plays in our walk of faith, we will never live an overcoming Christian life. See your natural mind, the Bible says, if it's not renewed with God's word, it is the enemy of God. In other words, your natural mind is going to always tell you things that are contrary to God's word. That's why we have to renew our mind and study on this subject to find out what we need to do about our mind.

You see you cannot expect to live a positive, overcoming, victorious Christian life with a negative, worried, anxious mind. It just doesn't happen that way. You eventually become what you think. The Bible even says so in Proverbs 23:7. It says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." So it's so important that we discuss the issues of the mind.

Jesus talked a lot about the mind. The Bible talked a lot about the mind. I was reading this week in Ephesians 4:23, it says, "Be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind, having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude." And one day Jesus was walking through a village in the book of Mark, chapter 12. And a man came up to him and said, "Jesus, what's the most important commandment there is?" And He said it is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all of your mind. See Satan knows if he can effect the way we think, he can hold us back from being everything God wants us to be. He can keep us back from fulfilling our destiny that God's planned for each of us. And it is in our mind that the battle takes place.

And the Bible says there in II Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 3—if you'll take a look at that. It's a simple scripture, but it says, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not." Let me call your attention to that phrase, the god of this world hath blinded the minds to the people who don't believe. Once again here in this scripture we see Satan working in his favorite territory, in the area of our mind.

And I realize today most of you are born again, that is you've made a personal decision to have a personal relationship with the Lord, but we all have friends and family members and loved ones that aren't born again. They've never accepted this free gift of salvation. And you know what I want to study today is, What's holding them back? What's hindering them? What's stopping them? What are their big hang-

ups? See I believe if we can gain insight into this area, then we can more properly and effectively deal with them. So I want to talk about today just how does Satan blind the minds of people that don't believe. What can we do as born again believers to keep Satan from blinding the minds or to break that power.

You see mankind stands in a strategic position. We can be contacted by both God and by Satan. We cast the final vote of which one we choose to listen to. We are creatures of choice. God didn't make any of us robots. He gave us all a will of our own. We all have the power to choose. And if we choose to listen to the negative thoughts of the enemy, they will lead to defeat, misery, anxiety, fear and eventually it will lead to eternal death. However, if we choose to listen to the thoughts of God and the voice of God it will lead to everlasting life, perfect peace, happiness, joy; He will fill the void that's deep down within each of us, that void that's there.

But you see it's so important that we choose to listen to the thoughts of God. And what I want us to see is that God's thoughts are in His word. The enemy bombards your mind with his thoughts all the time. If you don't know the thoughts of God, if you don't get the scriptures out of the Bible and into your mind, you're not going to even know when the enemy is telling you a lie.

And in II Corinthians, Chapter 2, verse 11—you can turn to it. I'm just going to quote you the part that says, "For we are not ignorant of the enemy's schemes." But you know I was studying this week and the word "schemes" in the original Greek comes from a root word that means "the mind." Isn't that interesting? The word "schemes" in this case comes from a root word that means "the mind." And I believe what the Holy Spirit was trying to say or what was saying here was, "Don't be ignorant of how the enemy can twist your thoughts." Don't be ignorant of how the enemy can twist the scriptures. Don't be ignorant of the enemy's mind oriented strategy.

Satan is a masterful deceiver. I've seen him so many times; he deceives people by twisting the scriptures, twisting their thoughts. He tells people that God doesn't love them, that He's mad at them, and that He's out to get them. You know I had somebody just a couple of weeks ago, they came to me and—Listen, we're just going to look at some of the ways that Satan twists our thoughts. But he came to me and he said, "Joel, you're always up there happy and preaching about a good God, a compassionate God, and it seems like everybody there is happy." But he said, "I turned to my bible and in the book of Psalms there was a scripture that said God is angry at the wicked everyday." You see folks, this is so important. Satan can blind your mind with one scripture if you're not careful. Under the New Covenant God is not angry at the world any more. He's not angry at the world any more. When Jesus commissioned us in Mark 16 to go into all the world and preach this Gospel to everyone. You know what the very word "Gospel" means? It means "good news." It's not good news to go tell people that God's angry at them, that He's going to send them to hell. No, under the New Covenant when Jesus died and paid the price on the cross for all our sins and sicknesses, you know He's already paid the price. The debt has already been paid. The good news is that you don't have to die and go to hell; the good news is you just have to accept the forgiveness of God.

You know I grew up as a preacher's kid and it seems like, and I don't know if this happened to my other brothers and sisters, but it seemed like everybody came up to me and shared with me their problems, and they shared with me their beliefs about God. And I think even almost by accident, I've gained a tremendous insight into

what human nature thinks about God. And it's very--it's kind of unusual. And it's kind of exemplified in this little story or in this little incident that happened when I was just a little boy. I was probably 6 or 7 years old.

And a friend of mine that lived two houses down, he came over to our house. He knocked on the door and said, "Joel, come out here. You've got to see this sign the neighbor put on their fence." They'd just put up a new sign. Well this little boy, my friend, 6 or 7 years old also, he got words turned around a lot of times. And so we ran out down the street and something big was going on. And you know we took off. And I went there and it was simply a sign on the fence that said, "Beware of dog." Now he got it mixed up and it said--he was so in awe. He said, "Look at it, Joel. It says, 'Beware of God.'" (Laughter) You know, and as funny as that is it sort of shows you how mankind thinks about God.

I can tell you this, the resounding, overwhelming fact that I've found in my 20, 30 years, however long I've been old enough to think properly, is that people think God's out to get them. They think God's out to punish them. They think God's out to send them to hell. You know what that is? Satan is blinding their minds to the gospel of Jesus. That's the way he works. It's not real complicated. It's very simple. And if you go back--you know if you really get the thoughts of God out of the Bible, you go back to the most famous scripture of all, John 3:16. Y'all know what that says. It says, "God so loved every one of you." Make it personal. "That He gave his only son." He gave it for you. He gave it for me. You see, I have an only son. I've got a little boy. I can only imagine what kind of love that must have taken to give my son for some wrong somebody else did. But yet, that's what God did. He's a good God. He gave His only son that if we'd only believe on Him, we would have everlasting, eternal life. That's the goodness of God.

Don't let Satan blind your mind, telling you that God's out to get you. Friends, God does not have a sledgehammer, walking around heaven with a mischievous grin on his face, looking for people that He can send into hell. You know, so many times, it's comical but you think about it. You think He's walking around saying, "Gabriel, come over here and help Me. Let's find some- there's somebody." Baam! You know, "Send another one to hell, Gabriel. High five. Let's go get somebody else." (Laughter)

You know what I mean? It doesn't work that way. As funny as that is, people think that God has nothing better to do than to watch them and try to send them to hell. Listen, under the New Covenant, your sins have already been forgiven. Don't let Satan blind your mind. (Applause)

I know some of you say, "But Joel, you don't know what kind of life I lived. If you only knew who I was. If you only knew my past. If you only knew the evil mistakes I've made. Joel, I'm sure not perfect." But listen, see, that's a lie of the enemy too. How many of you here, before you came to Christ, were perfect? Is there anybody here? I don't see anybody. Mack almost raised his hand.

But listen, none of us are perfect. You don't come to Christ because you're perfect. You come to God just as you are. I say it all the time. Then He changes us. If we all got what we deserved, then I wouldn't be up here today. You know what? If we all got justice, we would all be in trouble. We'd all be in hell. But it's not justice; it's the mercy of God that lasts from generation to generation to generation. (Applause)

Jesus died so that even in all of our sins we might come to God. And I'm convinced most people think, and it's the way that Satan blinds their mind, they think that, you know, God's got His back turned toward them and that He's angry at them. And if you go up and ask Him for anything, it's almost like you're bothering God. Like He'll turn around in disgust and say you know, "What do you want? Leave me alone." That's not the image you've got to have of God, folks. We serve a good God. I say it often, but when you think of God, you've got to think of the most powerful, loving creature in the whole world. He's got His arms held open wide toward you. He's not mad at you. He's not looking at you in disgust. He's got a smile on His face. And you know what He's saying. He's saying, "If you will come to Me, I will give you rest, I will help you. If you just put your trust and confidence in Me, I will see you through this life." And He says, "Not only that, I'll make a way that you can live with Me forever." He's says, "I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you." See that's the goodness of God.

And we need to expose the lies of the enemy that keep people back from receiving Him. It's the way he blinds the mind thinking that, you know, that God's out to get them, that He is not a good God. Thank God, Daddy always preached about the goodness of God. That's what leads people to repentance. (Applause)

You know another lie we need to expose is the enemy tells people, "You're just as good as those church folks. They're just a bunch of hypocrites. Man, you're as good as they are. All that religion, all that Christianity, all those smiles, that's just something to fill their emotional needs. It's just a big hoax, man". See, these are lies from the enemy. He usually tops it off with this: "And all those people want down there at the church anyway is your money." Have y'all ever heard that? Listen friends, I'll tell you this, we're not interested in your money, we're interested in you. Don't let the enemy deceive you and let you got to a place—Amen, all right. (Applause) Don't let the enemy deceive you with those lies. Don't let him blind your mind with that kind of thinking. Nowadays the enemy tells people you know, "You don't need God," you know with this new age. "You're God in yourself. You've got everything in yourself. You've got all the power you need." See, that's the furthest thing from the truth. Without God we are a big fat zero. Don't you all agree?

See, the bible says that in Isaiah 55, here's what you've got to do. Don't listen to the voice of the enemy. It says, "Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts; then let him return to the Lord and God will abundantly pardon and God will have mercy." There's something that you have to do. It's a choice you have to make. And that is to forsake your ways and to forsake those erroneous thoughts or you'll die and spend your life in eternal punishment. What a pain! You know, what a tragedy, really. It's a shame because most of society in general lives their life in spiritual blindness. This is really a shame. It's almost like a thick dark veil has been draped across their thinking so that they can't see the Gospel. But it doesn't have to be that way, folks. I'm not here telling you bad news. We've got good news. Two thousand years ago, our resurrected Savior defeated this enemy, He defeated Satan, and it is His power and only His power that can penetrate that veil and can pierce that veil and bring light into your life. But you've got to call upon the name of the Lord.

You are creatures of choice. The choice is yours. The bible says, "I set before you life and death, choose life." He gives you the answer. And let me tell you this, friends, when you make that choice for the things of God; when you ask Jesus to come into

your heart, do you know what happens? The powerful Holy Spirit in an instant infuses the very life of God into your spirit being. The bible says you will be totally and completely made new. You will be born again. And do you know that veil that was over your mind for all those years, it is disintegrated in a second by the power of the living Christ. You see, but the choice is up to us. The choice is up to us. Listen to the lies of the enemy or to believe what God says.

What I want you to see, as born again believers, and I know most of you are born again, but some of you come to me and you say, "Joel, I'm concerned about my child. They're not concerned about the things of God. There's nothing I can do." We must realize, folks, that there is a thick, dark veil that Satan has put up over the minds of them that don't believe. And no wonder they're not interested in the things of God, Satan has blinded their minds. I talked to somebody just the other day down at this altar and they were in tears. They said, Joel, "I'm so concerned about my parents. They won't listen to me about the things of God. They won't come to church. They won't have anything to do with me." And you know what I told him? I said, "You know, friend, it's Satan blinding their minds. Talking with them with persuasive speech that might help a little bit. You know, reasoning with them, that might help a little bit. Debating the scriptures, that might help a little bit. But there's not, those things will not break the power of the enemy. There's only one Name and one power that can break the power of the enemy over their mind. And that's the name of our resurrected Savior."

What we must realize is that we are in a spiritual warfare for our loved ones. We must engage in that warfare. See time is late; eternity is long. Daddy used to say it. Heaven is real and hell is too hot for us to fail God. I am convinced if we would spend more time on our knees binding the powers of darkness over our friends and family member's minds, then we would see God send the powerful Holy Spirit to break that veil; to penetrate that veil; to pierce that veil. And then we would see them begin to come into the kingdom of God. But you must realize somebody's got to stand in the gap for your loved ones. Somebody's got to be there. But do it on a spiritual level. The warfare going around us is in the spiritual realm. You're not going to do it with persuasive speech.

I was thinking about the story of Ben Priest. Most of you know Ben. Ben went to this church for years. But for years and years, Ben got off into riding in outlaw motorcycle gangs. You know what those gangs stand for. But he rode with one of the most notorious gangs in this part of the country. They were known for criminal activity. And you know what goes with gangs: prostitution, extortion, all kinds of stuff. Ben told me, he said, "Joel, I can't count the times I almost got shot; I can't count the times I almost got killed." But you know what? Ben said, "The further, Joel, I got into that lifestyle, the more and more miserable I got. I was not happy." He said, "I just sunk to an all time low." And he told me, "Joel, one day I was standing in front of my mirror at my house, looking in that mirror, and looking back at me was a dead man." He said, "Joel, I'd sunk to an all time low." He had a terrible problem with drugs and he said, "I just decided at that point I was going to end it all. Life was not worth living." And do you know what happened? He said, "Joel, the thought came to my mind, Why don't you go to church one more time?" And do you know what was so interesting about this story? Ben had somebody praying for him. His little mother was praying for him, binding the powers of darkness. Somebody was standing in the gap for him. And you know think about it. Would he have had that though if somebody hadn't been praying? His mom prayed for him. In the

darkest times, when it looked like there was no way, no way this guy's ever going to get born again. He was riding with one of the meanest gangs around. But yet Ben heeded the call that day. He said, "Joel, I decided to go to church one more time before I ended it all," because his mother was praying I'm convinced. And he showed up here at Lakewood Church May the 11th in 1980. I still remember him telling him the story. Thank God for Lakewood Church. You can come just as you are. We don't care what you look like. We guarantee you, we'll accept you just as you are. (Applause)

And that's exactly what many of you did. He was over at the old building. But he said, "Joel, I walked in." And you got to understand Ben. He's about a foot taller than I am. He weighs about 250 or 300 pounds. He has a long beard, the earrings, the headband; he had the blue jeans, the vest, the tattoos, the motorcycle boots. I mean he looked like the meanest roughest guy you would ever meet. You would never want to run into him in a dark alley some night. I mean, this guy was mean. But he walked in and he said, "Joel, people accepted me just as I was. I sat down there." He said, "For the first time I felt the love of God in my life." He said, "But you know when you're dad preached," he said, "I could not go down to the altar." He said, "My shoes were nailed to the floor." But you know just think about this. His mother's praying. Spiritual warfare is going on for him. Somebody's standing in the gap. He went out to his motorcycle that day after service and he knelt down in the ditch right beside his motorcycle. And see, sometimes we make salvation too difficult and too complicated. But he knelt down and he said, "Oh God," he said, "if you're real like they say you're real, come into my life right now." And you know what, he said, "Joel, I felt the peace that I'd never felt in all of my life." And do you know what happened? The powerful Holy Spirit disintegrated that veil that was across his mind for years and years. (Applause)

See the Holy Spirit infused the very life of God into him in just a moment. And the power of the enemy was broken over his mind. See, it's because somebody stood in the gap for him. And I just want to challenge you. You've all got loved ones. You've all got friends and family members. Maybe they won't listen to you, but hey, if you bind the powers of darkness over their mind, that's when you're going to see results. Satan, the god of this world, has blinded their minds. We've got to fight him on his own territory that's in the spiritual level.

You know and the bible says in Matthew 18:18, whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The bible says in the next verse, if any two of us agree as touching anything, God said He would do it for us.

How many of you today have people you're concerned about? Let's take time right now. Let's stand up together. Everybody stand up and we're just going to bind the powers of darkness over their mind. Join hands together, if you would.

Father, I just thank You and praise You. We do according to Your word, Father. We come to You in agreement. We're touching each other, Father. Now, Father, we come to You and ask You that Your powerful Holy Spirit would pierce that dark veil, Father, against the minds of our loved ones that are represented here today.

Devil and demon forces, we serve you notice. We bind your power. We command you to take your hands off of our loved ones, off of our friends, off of our family members.

Father, we thank You and praise You that Your power is greater than any power in this world. It's not by might, it's not by power, but it's by Your Spirit, Father. Father, we thank You and praise You that they will begin to respond to the things of God. We thank You that the Holy Spirit is convicting them, piercing that darkness, in the name of Jesus. Father, we praise You now that You hear us when we pray. We just thank You and praise You for it. Amen. Amen. I believe it is done.

You may be seated. Amen. (Applause)

See, it is a spiritual battle. And I encourage you to continue to bind the forces over your friends and family members. And listen, what we need to understand. Let me bring out another point today is that before you got born again, the enemy worked on your mind. That was his territory. Once you got born again, the veil is broken over your mind. But don't think for a minute that he doesn't still want to work in that area of your mind. He's going to continue to send you thoughts into there. You've got to cast them down in the name of Jesus. When you get born again, God works on your spirit man. The power of the enemy is broken over your mind. But God expects us to take care of our mind and to renew our mind. The enemy will always come at you and tell you, you can't do things. The first thing he'll tell you is you're not even born again. But listen, folks, you've got to resist him in the name of Jesus. I don't care if you've been born again five minutes or fifty years, you have the power to resist him. He is already defeated.

The Bible says in James 4:7, "if we would resist the enemy, he would flee from us." It doesn't say that he would think about fleeing, it didn't say that he might have to flee. The Bible says in one translation, that he would run in terror from every one of you. You have the power. (Applause)

In Luke 10:19, Jesus said, "I give you power over all the power of the enemy." God's already done His part two thousand years ago. We've got to be the ones to have some backbone, to have some strength, to have some spizarinktum as daddy used to say, to stand up to the enemy and resist him. Some of you say, "Joel, you know I don't feel qualified, I don't feel worthy." Listen, we're not worthy in ourselves. We're worthy because Jesus died and made us worthy.

And you know, I was thinking about, I love that illustration my dad told about someone. It talked about, you know, it's not who we are, it's who's we are. You have the power when the enemy comes. And he told this illustration about some man that saw a vision and Satan was standing right over there about 20 or 30 feet away, 15 feet away, maybe. This man was standing there. And Satan was standing facing this man just like where I am. And Satan had this man in this terrible gazing grip. And this man couldn't move. He said, Joel. He didn't tell me, but he said he was a born again Christian; but was just filled with fear. And he thought, "Why can't I move? Why can't I get out of here? I know I have power over the devil." But all of a sudden, Jesus stepped into the room. And He stepped right in between the two men and He stepped facing the enemy. And the man said, "You know I felt such peace at that point. You know, I was overwhelmed with peace and all that." But he said, "All of a sudden Jesus started backing up." And I thought, "Jesus, don't back up. You're not

scared of the enemy. Don't back up." But Jesus continued to back up. And finally, Jesus got right here and he took one more step back. And Jesus' legs went into this man's legs; Jesus' arms went into this man's arms; Jesus' torso went into this man's torso; and see, it's the power that is in us; the greater power is in us. And he said, "I just felt myself raise my hand and say, Satan, you will bow. And he just fell to his face, right there." (Applause)

See what I want you to know today, You have the power. We have to break the power over the friends and family member's minds. When the enemy comes against us, we have to resist him. We can win the battle of the mind.

Let's just raise our hands and thank God for His word. Father, we praise You and we thank You. You are worthy to be praised, Father. And we thank You for Your word. We receive it. We will be doers of the word. You have made us overcomers. In Jesus' name.

If you don't mind bowing your heads in prayer, let me talk to those who are viewing by television.

We're so glad you're viewing, We never want to leave the broadcast without letting you know that you can be born again. I've talked about it a lot today. If you will simply just call upon the name of the Lord, you will be changed. Just like Ben Priest was. All you have to say is, Oh God, come into my heart. Be my Lord. Be my Savior. Jesus, I'll serve You all the days of my life. It's just a simple prayer. You don't have to make it complicated. If you prayed that and mean it with your heart, you will be totally and completely changed. And I believe you've done that today. And we hope you'll come out and see us when you can at Lakewood Church. We've got a bunch of loving caring people and we'd love to have you here. Until this time next week, God bless you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 5"

**Joel Osteen Sermon #SER_BOTM_005 - 6/13/99
(Don't Worry or Fear; Trust God)**

DODIE: We want to welcome you today to television. We are so glad that you've joined us here at Lakewood Church. We consider it a great pleasure and an honor to be able to bring our television program into your homes.

The reason I'm holding my granddaughter, Elianna here, is because a lady who watches us by television crocheted this dress for her and sent it to her. And I wanted her to know how we appreciate it. And I think it was wonderful. And she looks beautiful. Thank you for doing that.

Aren't you glad that the people have joined us today? Would you give them a hand clap please. (Applause)

JOEL: Remain standing if you would. You know I was thinking about it. Nobody's ever crocheted me anything. I've been up here a long time. I could use something.

No listen. You know I'm only kidding. I've got everything I need.

I won't wear it. I promise you.

But I'm excited about coming to Lakewood. Excited all of you guys came. It's just good to see you all. You know I said I'm not nervous because I know ya'll are my family, ya'll are my friends, ya'll are very forgiving people. If I make a mistake, ya'll will forgive me.

Let's hold up our Bible. Let's study together. Say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) God bless you.

SERMON: You may be seated. Open your Bibles please to the book of John, chapter 11. I've been sharing with you the last several weeks on "Winning the Battle of the Mind."

I've been encouraging you on the importance of guarding your thought life, guarding your mind. I say it often but it's worth repeating. You cannot expect to have a positive overcoming Christian life with a negative, worried, fearful mind. How many of you realize that? I want that to get real deep down inside of you. Because you'll

eventually become what you think. The mind plays a tremendously important role in our walk of faith.

In the book of Ephesians there is a principle that we need to realize or a great truth there. And it says that, "we are in a warfare". There's a battle going on. But it's not a battle in the physical realm; it's in the spiritual realm. You could even say it's in the unseen or mental realm. You've got to realize you're in a warfare whether you know it or not. We have an enemy. And the only way the enemy can get into our personality, into our emotions, into our thoughts, it's through our mind.

Now friends, we control that doorway to our mind. The only access that he has is the access that you give him. And I want to say something today very sincerely and with all the compassion I can. But if you today have a worried mind or a fearful mind or an anxious mind or even if your mind is racing around with anger or unforgiveness or bitterness, unfortunately friend, you have opened up that doorway to the enemy and you by your own choice have given him access into your life.

The Bible says it's the truth that's going to make us free. God said, "people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." We need to realize where the trouble comes from. Many times we open up the doorway. And see, life is a series of choices. None of us are robots. God gave us all the power to make our own decisions. None of us are clones. God said you are creatures of choice. So you all have a will and decision making power on your own.

Now everyday you are bombarded with hundreds and hundreds of thoughts that come against your mind. You again must choose which ones to believe, which ones to act upon, and which ones to cast down and just throw aside and forget about. See we must make that choice ourselves. And Satan works by fear. Fear will bring you anxiety, worry, doubt, and unbelief. Everyday you are bombarded with thoughts that could bring fear into your mind. That's what Satan wants to do. And you must realize he's trying to get you to fear the future, to have a fear of failure, to have a fear of not being accepted, to have a fear of not having enough money, to have a fear of not living a healthy, normal life. But we must realize that none of those fears will come to pass if you don't bite off into his lies and listen to them and believe them and act upon them.

See, friends, it's when you act upon fear that fear can bring things to pass. Just like faith brings things to pass, fear can bring things to pass. Job said, "The thing that I greatly feared came upon me."

And what I want you to see today is if you have any of those negative thoughts, you've got to make the choice to cast them down. Quit thinking about them. And whatever you do, don't act on fear because then fear gives the enemy the right to bring that fear to pass. See, what we must realize is that the enemy cannot do anything he wants to do to you any time he wants to do it. It does not work that way. You have to give him permission. You have to give him authority. He has to first deceive you.

His power over your life is totally and completely limited if you will refuse to listen to his lies. The battle's taking place right here, friends. And unless he can deceive us and get us to believe his lies, and then act upon that fear, then the enemy has a legal right to bring that fear to pass. Very important that we understand that.

See, the Bible says in Matthew 8:13, Jesus said, "As you have believed, so it will be done unto you."

I want to ask you something today. What have you been believing lately? Have you been believing the lies of the enemy? Or have you taken time to get into God's word, find the scriptures, meditate on them, and believe what God says unto you?

As born again believers, we should take regular inventory of what we've been thinking about. You ought to regularly examine your thought life. This is very powerful. You know the enemy's going to send you all these negative thoughts. You've got to examine what you've been thinking about. Think about what you've been thinking about. Ask yourself the question. Be real honest. What have I been thinking about lately?

The Bible says in Philippians 4:8; God's very clear about what we should think about. God said, "Think on things that are pure, things that are lovely, things that are wholesome, things that are true, things that are honest, things that are of good report;"

Think on things that build you up not things that tear you down. But it's a choice you have to make. Because society in general--we talked about this--society in general is very negative. It's just the opposite of what I just told you. Society will tell you what's wrong, not what's right. What's ugly, not what's beautiful. What you don't have, not what you do have. You know, it just tells you just the opposite of these things. If you doubt that, pick up the newspaper today and see if the focus isn't on the negative.

And see friends, it's the choice you have to make. If you watch the news tonight, you know, the enemy will try to bring about a fear that the economy is going to crash. Or the stock market's going to crash. Or if that doesn't happen, surely the Y2K problem's going to knock us all out. And if it doesn't get us the ozone layer's going to open up and get us. If the ozone layer doesn't get us, some little green men from Mars are surely going to come get us. You will always have something to fear. That's what I want you to see today.

I remember in 1986 when daddy had open-heart surgery, he went through that surgery and he recovered fine. But afterwards, we met the doctors and I was there. And the doctor said, "Pastor, you're going to have to change your diet. You're going to have to eat right. You're going to have to be very careful how you eat."

And they went through this long spill. And I remember specifically at the end, they said, "Pastor, whatever you do, don't eat butter. Butter is going to clog up your arteries. Eat margarine. Don't eat butter."

Well, you know, for 10 or 12 years, daddy was so diligent about that. Every restaurant we went to, he said, you know, "I got to have margarine, not butter." But you know you probably saw the report not too long ago--about a year ago. This long report I was watching on the news. I was sitting there in disbelief. It talked about how bad margarine was for you. It went on and on. And I remember, the final tag line they said. And friends, they talked about it on the news, if you have heart disease, whatever you do, don't eat margarine, eat butter.

You know that reminds me, they did a study not too long ago—and I looked carefully to make sure Dr. Cherry was not here and he's not. But they did a study about people that ate real healthy versus people that just ate whatever they wanted to eat. And they did this long study. Ya'll probably heard it a couple of years ago. And they found out after studying people that ate-- excuse me. Maybe I'm not supposed to tell this. I don't want to tell something bad. I'm sure it's going to get back to Dr. Cherry. But, they said on this long study they discovered that people that ate really healthy lived an average of nine months longer than those that don't eat healthy.

And I don't know if you're like me, but when it comes my time to go, I could care less whether I go in January or October. Just let me leave. (Applause)

But you're going to always have something to worry about. You're going to always have something to fear. You have to choose not to fear. Fear is a force. Let me get back on track now. Fear is a force. And I know some of you say, "Joel if you only knew my situation. You don't know what I'm facing. You don't know what I'm going through."

That's not funny. My mouth is dry.

But you say, "You don't know what I'm going through."

But listen. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the story of Jehoshaphat. I talk about him a lot because Jehoshaphat was in a terrible situation. He was in a hopeless situation. And I love what he did. It's a tremendous example to all of us. If anybody had a right to worry and to be filled with fear and anxiety, it would have been Jehoshaphat. The Bible says in 2nd Chronicles, chapter 20, that he had a small band of people and he was surrounded by three large armies. These armies were closing in against him. In the natural, barring a miracle from God, he was as good as dead. There was no way he was going to get out of this situation. But I love to read between the lines to see what he was really thinking, what he was really believing. Second Chronicles, chapter, I think it's 20 verse 12. He prayed this prayer. It's one of my favorite prayers. He said, "Lord, he said, we have no power or might or ability in ourselves."

In other words, he's saying "God, we know we're outnumbered a thousand to one. We know there's no way that we're going to come out of this situation barring your help." But he went on to say, "God we don't know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

What a great prayer that is. See, all of us, friends get to situations where we don't know what to do; there's nowhere to turn. We've got to keep our eyes on God. But where we miss it so many times, we've prayed the prayer: God we don't know what to do. But we stop right there. And you know what? The enemy will send you thoughts of fear and anxiety and panic. And we start to believe that. The minute you act upon fear, that gives the enemy a legal right to bring it to pass.

We need to see what Jehoshaphat did. He didn't stop right there. He said, God, we don't know what to do but he in fact said or in a sense said, God I refuse to worry. I refuse to give into panic. I refuse to give into anxiety. I'm going to keep my eyes upon you. In his darkest hour, he said, God, I'm going to believe that you're still on the throne. That the Son of God is still seated at the right hand and I'm not going to

give into the lying thoughts of the enemy. See, if he had given into fear and anxiety, I guarantee you we wouldn't be reading about Jehoshaphat. We wouldn't be reading about him at all. But he chose.

See you have to make a choice. And a little while later we read how God supernaturally delivered him. He didn't even have to fight. God fought the battle for him. And some of you today--(Applause)

Some of you today are facing tremendous situations. And you say, "Joel, I can't relate to that. That's a guy in the Bible. You know he was superhuman. He didn't have feelings like..." You know, don't bite off into that lie. The people in the Bible had human emotions and feelings just like I do; just like you do. Don't think for a minute when he wasn't in that terrible situation that Satan wasn't bombarding his thoughts ninety miles an hour. He was making a conscious choice to cast down those lies.

You see, if he would have given into anxiety, do you know what anxiety would have led to? It would have led to panic. And no doubt he would have taken that little band of people and try to sneak out somewhere. And got out of God's will and probably would have been destroyed. See we have to, we can't listen to the lies of the enemy. The battle is taking place in our mind. Very important.

And I'll be real honest. I know some of what I'm saying is not the easiest thing in the world to do. I won't say--I'll be honest with you and tell you I've worried plenty of times. But you have to make a choice. There's probably not a person in here that hasn't felt fear when you went to the doctor and had a test and you had to wait two or three days for the report to come back.

But what you've got to see friends is that fear is a force just like faith is a force. It's when you give into fear that you give the enemy this legal right to bring things upon us. And friends, Satan is already defeated. Let's don't be deceived by his lies.

And today, so many people are filled with worry and anxiety. And they tell me, they say, Joel, that's just the type personality I am. My mother worried, my grandmother worried, I'm just a stressed out person. And if you knew what I was going through, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, on and on and on. But listen friends, you got to be truthful with yourself. You are giving the enemy access into your life. And it's a shame.

And you know some of you say "Joel, I'll quit worrying, I'll quit being filled with fear when this situation is all worked out and when it's all resolved." Friends, you know what I'm going to say. That situation, once it's resolved, there's going to be something else to worry about. You've got to stop right now. You've got to stop right now.

The Bible says in Philippians 4:6, "Don't worry about anything, pray about everything."

The Bible says, "Perfect love casts out fear."

Isaiah 26:3, "You keep your mind stayed on God and you'll have perfect peace."

The book of Matthew, chapter 6 says, "Which of you by worrying can change anything?" It goes on to say, "Don't worry about tomorrow, it's got enough problems of its own."

And what you've got to realize--this is very important--listen to this. Your enemy, Satan, is never satisfied until you are totally and completely destroyed. He doesn't want to leave you where you're at; he wants to totally make you useless for the kingdom of God. So important to understand.

And the more that we give into fear and worry and anxiety and all these negative emotions, you know what we're doing? We're giving the enemy a right to take us to the next stage. And none of us should do that. Do you know what that next stage is? That next stage is depression. Millions of people suffer from depression. They don't even want to get out of bed in the morning. They don't want to participate in society. Do you know what happens? Satan has just slowly, very cunningly led them through a series of lies, they've bit off on every one of them. And now they're living in a mental torment. I bet all of you know people like that. They're really living in a living hell.

And you've got to realize what your enemy is like. He is an evil, perverted enemy that takes pleasure in seeing us suffer. An evil perverted enemy. He wants to destroy you. And every time you give into this fear and just continue to hang on to it, you know, you've given him the right to lead you down a track you've never even dreamed of. But friends, it doesn't have to be that way. We have the greater power on the inside of us. You can cast down those negative thoughts in the name of Jesus. (Applause)

See, it is my desire to expose the lies of the enemy. Expose the way he infiltrates our lives through our minds. My challenge to you today is to examine what you're thinking about. Think about what you've been thinking about. If you've been having thoughts of worry, fear, anxiety--Or, let's take it a step further, if your mind is racing around with unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, greed, jealousy, lust; you know friends, the time to stop it is now. Stop it and stop it now. Before it gets out of hand and the enemy takes you to places you've never even dreamed of.

And only you have the power to make that decision. I can't make it. God can't make it. Sister Dearman can't make it. Nobody can make it except you yourself. You can make that decision. And I realize some of you are facing tremendous obstacles. I'm not doubting that at all. I watch during the prayer time and I see people down here and they're pouring their hearts out. Tears are flowing. My heart sympathizes for you. I'd do anything in the world I could for you. But all I can do is tell you that you have to resist the enemy yourself. You have to cast out those lying thoughts. You can't act on fear. You've got to be the one to do it. And you can do it. That's the good news. (Applause)

Every one of you can do it. And especially in the struggles and adversities of life, you've got to stand strong. That's when it's easy to let your guard down and let the enemy get into your mind. Don't do that. Don't give the enemy any foothold in your mind.

You know Dr. Cherry pointed out the other day not only do fear, worry, and anxiety; not only do they dilute our spiritual life, not only do they dilute our faith. He went on

to say how medical science is beginning to discover how these negative emotions begin to effect our immune system.

Did y'all catch that? It's worth repeating. Listen to this. They've been doing all these studies and they're finding out that, you know God made us with a tremendous immune system to fight off sickness and disease. Your immune system is made up of hundreds and hundreds and thousands of cells. And many of those cells their purpose is to fight off bacteria and viruses and cancer cells. And he talked about the natural killer cells, the NK cells. That God just totally designed those cells to seek out and destroy anything that is foreign to the body.

He went on to point out, Dr. Cherry, that is, that every one of us, according to medical science, every week we all develop an abnormal cancer cell in our body--a cancer cell or cells. Now I'm not telling you that; that's what medical science says. But thank God for our tremendous immune system that he made. They go in there and they fight off those cancerous cells and it keeps us healthy.

But these studies are beginning to show, the medical studies are showing that when a person is full of worry, anxiety, fear, all these negative emotions, it's showing that that's beginning to weaken your immune system.

Do you see how important it is to get this junk out of our mind? Do you see how Satan would love to start to get a foothold right here? Once he gets in he just kind of puts his shoulder down and tries to bust the door open. He'd love to get into your mind if you let him. If you continue on and then all of a sudden start to effect your physical body. But what a pity; it doesn't have to be that way.

First Peter 5:7 tells us what to do. It says to "cast those worries, cares, fears; cast them on God because he cares for you."

Don't carry around the burden on your own, friend. When you've got a situation you're concerned about, you've got to go to God about it. You've got to go to him individually for each situation. Say, God, I'm concerned about this situation. You pray over the situation. And then you say, God, I cast those cares upon you. I cast those worries. I cast those concerns. And then you refuse to worry about it anymore. Listen, you don't cast the problem. You deal with the problem. You get you a believer to join hands. You speak the word over the problem.

But you cast those cares upon God. And listen, once you do that, I'll guarantee you the enemy will come back and still give you negative thoughts. That's when you have to resist the devil in the name of Jesus. James 4:7 says when those negative thoughts come back, you just stand strong and resist the enemy. Don't be filled with his lies. Cast them over to him.

You know that's exactly what I've done. And y'all know since daddy's died in January, I've never spoken in public for 17 years. At least not this long-not a full message. And you know I told God at that point, God, I'll do anything you want me to do as long as you help me to do it, as long as you give me the power to do it, as long as it's not on my own strength. I realize I don't preach just like my dad, I don't have the same style. But I said, "God, as long as I can be myself and as long as You'll, you know, give me the power to do it."

I was casting all my cares upon God. But don't think for a minute that over these last few months I haven't had the enemy come against me and try to get me off track. Try to discourage me. All of you do. But I've already cast my cares upon God. Do you know what I do? I resist the enemy when he comes. I refuse to give into those lies. (Applause)

You know almost every Sunday driving home, I hear the same voice of the enemy come to me. I'll be driving to lunch and the enemy will come to me and say, Joel, you did okay today. You did all right. It seems like people enjoyed you today. But what in the world are you going to talk about next week. He says, what are you going to get up there and say? Your well's running dry. What are you going to say? Do you know what I do? I recognize the voice of the enemy. Sometimes I say, Satan, listen, don't you have any new lies? That's the same thing you've been telling me. (Applause)

I tell him all the time: Satan, you're worn out. You're washed up. You're not even creative any more. There's no way you're going to be able to deceive me with that. And you know what? I don't give place to that thought. It comes in two seconds and I say, Satan, in the name of Jesus, get out of my mind. Get out of my life. Get out of my car. You know what I mean? (Applause)

You know, and then you replace that thought with God's word. I began to just think the thoughts of God. Father, I thank you I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Father, I thank you that no weapon formed against me will prosper.

You take that thought. Don't dwell on it for five minutes or five hours or five days. Then it makes it harder to get rid of. Get rid of one thought at a time. Don't give it any place in your mind. And when you deal with the enemy, deal forcefully, resist him strongly, resist him angrily. Don't be a crybaby. Don't whine and cry and think you have to get somebody else. No, God's given you the authority. You have some authority. You have some backbone. (Applause)

You know when Jesus dealt with people, he dealt with them very compassionately, very loving, very caring. But you know when he dealt with the enemy, he dealt forcefully and he dealt angrily. And we should do the same thing. First John 3:8 said that, "Jesus came to destroy the works of the enemy." Destroy. That's a strong word.

And in the book of John, chapter 11, I haven't forgot about that. Look down there around verse 32. This is a story when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. I want to show you how Jesus dealt with the enemy here. In verse 32, I'll paraphrase it. But Mary said, Jesus if you would have been here my brother wouldn't have died. Now look at verse 33. John 11:33. "Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews that came with her weeping, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled."

I want to call your attention to that word "groan". Look five verses down. John 11:38. "Then Jesus again groaning in himself came to the tomb." That word "groan" is an unfortunate translation because it doesn't mean what we think it means today. At least from what I've studied. When we think of groan, we think of something like "Oh, man"; like an emotion of sorrow. But that's not what it meant at all. The original Greek word that "groan" comes from is a word, I'll pronounce it the best I can, "embrimaomai". Do you now what "embrimaomai" means? To snort with anger;

to have indignation; to sternly rebuke or growl. Embrimaomai is a word that is not associated with sorrow. It is a word that is associated with anger.

Do you see that when Jesus was in that situation, I realize that he was sorrowful. The Bible even said in verse 35 that Jesus wept in this situation. He was sorry for Mary. He was sorry for the grieving loved ones. But when it came to how he thought about the prince of darkness about the author of sickness and disease; about the master deceiver, the Bible said in effect here, He snorted and growled with anger and indignation. No wonder he shouted with a loud voice "Lazarus come forth".

He was angry at the works of the devil and he dealt forcefully, he dealt angrily, and we should do the same thing. Don't you dare be a crybaby. Don't be a pacifist. When it comes to dealing with the enemy, you stand strong, you resist him; you attack the enemy and get him out of your life. (Applause)

Satan preys on weak, feeble Christians that don't know their authority. And it is really a pity and it is a shame. I don't want of us to be like that. The Bible says in Matthew 11:12, "The kingdom of God suffereth violence and the violent take it by force."

If somehow when you went home today, a rattle snake got into your home, maybe it was curled up in your kitchen, do you know when you got home, you would deal with it immediately, you would deal with it forcefully. It would have all of your attention. Man, you would get out and get a hoe; you'd get a shovel; you'd get a shotgun if you had to. You're going to get that thing out of your house. Do you know why? Because it could harm you. Do you know if it slithered off into the living room, you wouldn't say, Oh man, I'll get it after the ball game's over. I'll let my wife take care of that one. No, listen, you would deal with it immediately. Do you now why? Because there is an evil intruder that had entered your house that could harm you.

Well, think about it. Our physical houses are important. But how about our bodies? Temples of the Holy Ghost? When the enemy sends us his lying thoughts, we need to have the same concern, the same enthusiasm to get that evil intruder out of our mind because we know it could harm us if we continue to let it go for days and days.

It's so important to have that same concern, have that same enthusiasm. Never let the enemy; never give the enemy a place in your thoughts. Fear will bring things to pass.

My challenge to you today is to examine your thought life. Think about what you've been thinking about. If you give into fear, you're giving the enemy a right in your mind to enter your life. And who knows where he wants to take it. He wants to destroy you.

But thank God, I want all of us here at Lakewood to be the victors and not the victims. God has given us tremendous power. He says the power of the greater one is on the inside of you. You don't deal with the enemy on a level where you're scared of him. No, you stand up and be strong. And say when he brings those lying thoughts to you that you're not going to make it; that your kids aren't going to get off drugs; that you're not going to come out of debt; you just say: Satan, listen, I recognize your voice. And I command you in the name of Jesus to get out of my mind and get out of there right now. (Applause)

See you have the authority. Only you can do it. Then replace your mind. Fill your mind with God's word. And I'm telling you folks, you will win the battle of the mind. Think about what you've been thinking about. And don't give into fear.

Would you bow your heads in prayer please? And let me talk to those of you that are viewing by television. We're so glad you've joined us today. And we never want to leave the broadcast without giving you the opportunity to accept Jesus for yourself. You know it doesn't have to be complicated. All you have to do is call to the name of God and He will save you.

Just pray this simple prayer. Say, Oh God, come into my heart and save me. I repent of my own ways. Jesus, come in and be my Lord and be my Savior. If you prayed that simple prayer and meant it from the bottom of your heart, you ought to get in a good church. Let them disciple you. If you can, come out here to Lakewood. We would love to have you. We would more than welcome you just like you are. Until we see you this time next week, God bless you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 6"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_006 – 6/20/99
(No Condemnation)**

DODIE: We are so glad that you've joined us by television today. And I want to thank you for all the nice letters that we get from you. I know you understand we cannot answer all the mail that we get, but we really do appreciate your concern and your love for us. And thank you for writing such nice encouraging words to us.

Let me give you a scripture. This is II Timothy in the second chapter and this is good. "Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, He remains faithful to us and He will help us for He cannot disown us who are part of Himself. And He will always carry out his promises to us." Do you ever pray and it feels like you don't have any faith? Maybe you're too weak, you're sick. You don't have any faith left. Well, you do have faith because you've got the Word of God in your heart. But He will remain faithful to you no matter how you feel and He will always carry out his promises to us. Thank God for a God like that. And all the people said? Amen and amen. (Applause)

JOEL: I'm so glad to see everybody here. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you. And I wish all of you dads a happy Father's Day. I'll tell you a quick personal story about my dad. We had the best dad in the world. Daddy loved us kids. He'd do anything in the world for us kids. He lived to give to us. In the seventh grade I played basketball and Daddy would come to my basketball games. And you've got to understand, when Daddy went out in public he loved to look good. He always wore a 3-piece suit and he just loved to look good. And he'd come to my games and everybody—I'd see people in the stands look at him. They knew he was a minister. And of course, they were all dressed in their casual clothes. And I told my dad one time, I said, "Daddy, you know, when you come to my games don't feel like you have to wear a suit, you know?" You know it looked like he was coming to see the president and you know Daddy, he loved to please us. So I'll never forget what happened a couple of weeks later for opening my big mouth. Daddy came to one of our games--this moment is marked in my memory forever. He had on a pair of black shorts. (Laughter) Now listen, that's not so funny. We all wear shorts. But I'd never seen my dad in a pair of shorts in all of my life. And what I didn't realize is Daddy didn't own any tennis shoes. He wore with his black shorts his black dress socks and his black dress shoes. (Laughter) Listen, if you don't think that was bad enough, Daddy's legs had never seen the sun. (Laughter) His legs were so white it looked like the glory of the Lord was coming out of them. (Laughter) And I'll never forget me opening my big mouth. When he walked in front of all those fans, I'll never forget the stares he got that day. But you know what? Daddy had such a good heart; he did it for me. I didn't have the heart to say anything to him. (Laughter) When we got in the car to go home, I just said, "Daddy, you sure do look good in those 3-piece suits." (Laughter) Daddy was a unique individual. And you know how we miss him. I thank God we have the joy to see our loved ones again. (Amen.) You know, it helps me to know that in heaven there's no time. Daddy doesn't miss us because next thing we know we're going to be there. Now we feel the separation, but God gives us strength down here to go on. I know you have the hope of seeing your loved ones. And again I just wish you all a happy Father's Day.

Y'all ready to study your Bible today? Let's hold them up and say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

Sermon: God bless you. You may be seated. Open your Bibles please to Romans, Chapter 8, please. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

I want to talk a little bit about one of the enemy's favorite tricks today and that is condemnation. He loves to remind people of their past failures and their past mistakes. Has he ever done that to any of you? Sure he does. It's one of his favorite tricks. He knows that if he can keep people with a feeling of guilt and unworthiness and a feeling of shame that we will never be all God wants us to be. We will never fulfill the destiny that God has for us. He also knows that if he can keep us with the negative emotions, we will never fully understand and exercise our authority over him.

See you've got to realize folks that the enemy is totally and completely defeated. Jesus defeated him two thousand years ago. All that he can do to you is try to lie to you and try to deceive you into thinking wrong thoughts that hold you back from being what God wants you to be.

You see, all of us at one time or another, I'm sure it's happened to you. God's impressed upon you to do something, to step out in faith and maybe go witness to your neighbor, or maybe be more involved in the church. But the first thing when we take that step of faith, we hear this voice inside. It's the voice of the enemy and he begins to remind us of our past failures and our past mistakes. And he'll say something like: "Just who do you think you are? Do you think they could really use you down there at the church? Don't you know they've got somebody that hasn't made mistakes like you?" And he'll begin to replay those mistakes. Maybe you've been through a divorce or maybe your kids aren't serving God. And he'll say, "How dare you. Your kids aren't even serving God. God can't use you."

See he tells people: "There's somebody holier. There's somebody more worthy." Friends, this is a trick of the enemy. This is the lie of the enemy that we must cast down. If we allow the enemy free access and free rein into our thought-life, then he will continually bombard it with our most painful experiences, our most painful memories, our most negative failures, and our biggest mistakes. And he will play them over and over and over again—if you let him—in your imagination. And before long, if you keep listening to the enemy and your imagination's running wild, he'll convince you that God can't use you. God can't even forgive anybody as bad as you. See, friends, this is the trick of the enemy. It's condemnation.

Condemnation means "to blame, to pronounce guilty, to declare unfit for use." And friends, I want us to see today. I want us to make sure we know what God thinks about us and what the enemy thinks about us. God is a good God. God is a loving compassionate, caring, forgiving God. Now, the enemy is a lying, deceiving, condemning enemy that wants to keep you with all these feelings of shame and unworthiness and guilt for any mistake that you've made, big or little. But do you know what God says in First John 1:9? It says, "If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

First John 2:1 says that if we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father. It is Jesus Christ. In other words, God is the judge and Jesus is the lawyer that represents us. There's going to be some favoritism there. Isn't that great? And see we've all known people that have walked down this church aisle and they've given their lives to God and they've made a commitment to serve Him with all their heart. And they go fine for a couple of weeks but then they make a mistake. And they fall away. And here's where Satan comes. He comes doing what he does best. He begins to condemn them. He tells them things like: "You didn't really get saved. I told you, you couldn't live the Christian life. I told you not to walk down that aisle." And what he would really like to do--I'm convinced the goal of Satan is to make us think that when we make mistakes and when we fail God and displease Him, that God kicks us out of the kingdom and God doesn't want to use us anymore.

Friends, the Bible is very clear. If you make a mistake, you've just got to ask God for forgiveness. You've got to genuinely repent. And the Bible says that God cleanses you by the blood of Jesus Christ. He doesn't remember your sins anymore. And you've got to know this friends, that if somebody starts bringing up your past, it is not God. God's not going to start reminding you of your past. The Bible says in Revelation 12:10 that "Satan is the accuser of the brethren."

I got this letter this week. I want to read it to you. It just happened to come Friday. And it fit in just with what I'm talking about.

This man says, "Several years ago, I left church. I'd done some things that were so bad in my mind that I could not show my face again in the house of God. The hypocrisy, which gripped my soul, would not permit me to worship anymore. I just didn't think I could ask for forgiveness. I could not forgive myself. So how could I expect God to do so? I was so ashamed and I felt my actions, on top of everything else, had severed my relationship with God to the point that I knew if I did pray, nobody would be listening. I had it coming. I accepted the fact that I was now condemned."

See folks, thousands of people make a mistake. And they think God's ready to kick them out of the kingdom of God. That is so far from the truth. I want you to listen to this because it'll drive out fear and it'll drive out insecurity. When you get born again, when you ask Jesus to come into your life, when you make a personal decision to have a personal relationship with Jesus, the Bible talks about that you become born again. There's a birth that has taken place. You have been born into the family of God. Now you're a child of God. Now, friends, it doesn't mean you're a child of God on Monday and Tuesday and, when you make a mistake, on Wednesday and Thursday, you're a child of the devil. It doesn't work that way. You're a child of God. You've been born into the family. It's not one week on and two weeks off. There's

been a birth that's taken place and God's not looking to kick you out of the kingdom of heaven.

John 10:27, Jesus said, "my sheep hear my voice and they follow me and nobody can snatch them out of my hand." Friends, you are in the firm grip of the most powerful being in the universe, the grip of our Almighty God, our loving Savior. No wonder Jesus said, "he would never leave us nor forsake us," because we're right there in the palm of His hand.

Now, I'm not saying that all of us don't make mistakes because all of us make mistakes. We all fail God. We all feel that grieving right down in here, down deep. And it doesn't mean that God's kicked us out of the kingdom. Sometimes we don't want to go to God. It's because our fellowship is broken and not our relationship.

You've got to understand this. Husbands and wives, you can understand this probably, this example. Because there's been a time when every husband and wife in here—it doesn't matter how spiritual you are—you've had an argument. You've had a disagreement. And do you know what happens? You don't want to be around each other. There's too much tension. There's too much strain. The guy will go out and mow the lawn and the wife will go off to the grocery store. You know what I mean?

There's even been times when Victoria's had the nerve to disagree with me. (Laughter) I've been very quick to forgive that gross misjudgment on her part.

But listen, it's because our fellowship is strained at the time. Again, God's not trying to get rid of you.

It's like my little boy, Jonathan, when he does something that he's not supposed to do like he did this week. He came in. I caught him when he was trying to see how many rolls of toilet paper he could get down the toilet. Thank God I caught him on roll number three because there was plenty left. Or a couple of weeks ago, Jonathan took a little cup of cold water and he poured it on his little baby sister, Alexandra. She's six months old. I heard her scream. I went in there. I said, "Jonathan, what in the world did you do that for?" He said, "Daddy," he said, "she asked me to do it to her." (Laughter) I said, "Jonathan, she's six months old. She can't even say Daddy. You're trying to tell me she specifically asked you to do that?" And I know when Jonathan's trying to find something to say; he just thinks a minute. He said, "Daddy, do you believe in miracles?" (Laughter) It's hard to correct him after that.

Listen, (Laughter)—Okay. Listen, what I'm getting at is when I have to correct him for a mistake he's made, he might not want to be around me. But listen, he's still my son. He's still an Osteen. He's been born into the family. I can't get rid of that little tyrant that easy. Do you know what I mean? He's in the family.

And I know some of you are saying, you know, this is the same way it works with God. We all make mistakes. We all have failures. God doesn't remind us of our past. He's not trying to kick us out. We've been born into the family.

Friends, I know some of you are saying, "Joel, Joel, Joel, you're giving people too much security." Friends, listen to this carefully: God wants you to be secure. God wants you to be secure. You've got to understand that. (Applause)

God wants you to be so secure that when you make a mistake and you fail Him, you run to Him quickly and repent and ask for forgiveness. And not turn around and run away from Him. (Applause)

Do you know how many people there are like this guy that just wrote me the letter that have gone years and years and years because they've made a mistake. And the enemy just keeps telling them that God won't receive them back. God wants you to be so secure that when you ask for His forgiveness and you repent of your sins, then you will recognize the voice of the enemy that comes to you and tries to declare you guilty and tries to condemn you and make you feel unworthy. You'll recognize that voice and you'll command him to go in the name of Jesus and take that condemnation somewhere else.

You see, some of you say, "Joel, this sound too good to be true. I served God one time. I served Him for a year. But then I made a terrible mistake. Do you mean to tell me that God didn't kick me out of the kingdom right then? Do you mean to tell me God didn't excommunicate me? Do you mean to tell me that God would receive me back into Himself?" That's exactly what I mean to tell you. God wants to receive you. This is the message of the Gospel.

I dare any of you that have ever served God at one time and you've gotten away because Satan's tried to make you feel condemned like you haven't pleased God or you failed God. I dare any of you to take one step toward God and I will guarantee you that God will come running to you with His arms held open wide and He'll receive you back into fellowship with Him. (Applause)

See, this is the whole message of the Gospel. Even Jesus told about a man. He said there was a man that had a hundred sheep. And he lost one sheep one day. And he left the 99 and he went out and searched and he searched and he searched diligently for this one lost sheep, and he finally found that one lost sheep. He brought it back into the fold. And the Bible says that man rejoiced more over the one that returned than all the 99 that he had.

See, God's a forgiving God. He wants to receive you back. Even Jesus said in John 3:17, "I didn't come into this world to condemn anybody. I came that people might be saved." Jesus came to give us life. Isaiah 50, verse 9, the writer says, "God is for us; who dare condemn us, who dare declare us guilty."

And what I believe is what's happened in the past. And I don't say this wrong about any religion. Or I'm not trying to criticize anybody. But religion in general has made so many rules and regulations to follow. So many do's and don'ts that, you know, we feel condemnation when we can't live up to religion's standard. But see, God didn't want it that way. Religion tells you if you go to church this many times a week and if you do so many hours of community service, and if you wear the right clothes, and if you put enough Christian bumper stickers on your car. You know, and if you say, "Praise the Lord" enough. And if you wear your hear with that evangelistic wave then you'll certainly be saved. (Laughter) And you'll maintain your salvation. But friends, that leads to condemnation.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "It is by grace you are saved through faith; not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, lest any man should boast." (Applause)

See, I'm not saying that when you get born again you're not going to have some fruits of good work. Don't get me wrong. I'm just saying those good works don't get you saved. And they don't keep you saved. It's the gift of God.

We must understand that salvation is a completely and totally free gift. See, if you don't do that, then what you're trying to do is pay back your salvation with your good works. And God doesn't want it to be that way. Because the problem is that one day you're not going to be able to do as many good works you think you should. And then all of a sudden you're going to feel condemned. See, that's the way the enemy works. You're trying to pay back your salvation. We don't have to pay this back. It's a free gift.

You see, there's a big difference between something you've earned and something that's free. Suppose your boss came to pay you this week and he gave you your paycheck. You probably did not have an overwhelming sense of gratitude. You probably didn't have an overwhelming sense of gratitude because, you know why? You worked for that money. You earned it. The company owed you. You probably took it and you might have said, thank you.

But friends, listen, imagine this. If your boss came to you next week and he called you by name. He said, John, here's your paycheck. He said, but John, even though you've been late every day this week, even though your attitude is very poor, even though your productivity is way down. Because I genuinely love you and appreciate you, I'm enclosing a \$10,000 bonus in this week's pay period. Do you know what would happen after you fainted? (Laughter) Listen, you'd probably roll over and kiss his feet. Do you know why? It was a free gift. You didn't deserve it. You didn't earn it. You didn't have to work for it. And listen to this, you don't even have to pay it back. It's the gift of God.

See, we've got to understand the tremendous thing that God did for us in salvation. Really you know, we were all on our way to hell. You talk about a gift. Man, we should be grateful.

You know when Adam and Eve, when they sinned in the Garden of Eden, everything about mankind was perverted. You know, faith was turned to fear. The nature of God that was in them was turned to the nature of sin. And spiritual death was born in the heart of mankind. This created a tremendous need for a redeemer, for a substitute, for somebody that could come without this nature of sin, to come into this world and shed his blood to restore our broken relationship with God. And thank God when we were all spiritually dead, we were hopelessly lost, we were on our way to eternal damnation. Thank God for the goodness of God.

Do you realize what God did? The mercy of God is so tremendous. God sent His only Son. You know sometimes people write me and they say, "Joel, you talk so much about the goodness of God." But listen, they say, "What about the judgement?" But friends listen, God has done so much good for us to keep us out of judgement, I'd rather talk about the solution than the problem. (Applause)

You think about God. Two thousand years ago, He sent a sinless, spotless Son of God into this world. He did no wrong. All He did was good down here. He healed people. He touched people. Yet people treated Him like trash. They ridiculed Him.

They made fun of Him. They insulted Him. Yet He willingly gave His life for all of us. He said, "Nobody takes my life. I lay it down of myself."

And think about when they nailed Him on the cross. In one incredible moment, He bore the sins of the world, your sins, all your mistakes, and all your failures: past, present, and future. In one moment, He completely and instantaneously satisfied the righteous demands of the Father and He cleared your record. He paid the price totally once and for all.

The book of Hebrews talks about how He obtained an eternal redemption, something that's not going to pass away. An eternal release for our sins. Our sins have been forgiven. We don't have to live in the bondage of sin anymore. The debt has totally and completely been paid. And you think about under the Old Covenant, before Jesus died, they only had atonement. That means that their sins were only covered. That means you could go back and look at them if something's covered. But under this New Covenant, thank God it's built upon better promises. When Jesus died, He didn't cover our sins; he totally and completely washed them away forever. There is no more memory of your sin, no more memory. (Applause)

And friends, once you accept this forgiveness; once you repent of your sins, you don't have to fear your past anymore. God's not bringing up your past. Some of you say, "Joel, but you don't know the mistakes I've made. You don't know the failures." And you go on and on. But listen friends, you've got to know the truth what God says and it will make you free. You've got to release those sins.

God says, "their sins and iniquities I will not remember anymore forever."

God's not going to go back and look at what you did two or three years ago. You've got to be convinced of this or otherwise you're going to start feeling condemned. God doesn't have any memory of it.

John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," totally and completely, no memory. And you know it's unfortunate. Really, it's a tragedy that so many people unnecessarily live under the bondage of guilt and shame and unworthiness for past mistakes they've made. Yet, God's not the one that's bringing it up. The enemy's bringing that up. And if you live under that, that's going to create inferiority. It's going to create weakness. And friends you will never exercise the authority over the devil. You will never be all God wants you to be as long as there's this feeling of guilt and shame and unworthiness. You've got to get it out of your mind. Don't let the enemy bring that in.

You know, you've all heard people pray. I don't mean to make fun of them. But they pray, "Oh God, I'm such a weak worm of the dust. God, I'm such a low-down rotten failure. God, I'm such a black-hearted sinner. How can you use anybody as pitiful and as sorry as me?"

See, friends, God's not pleased with that false sense of humility after all that Christ has done for us on the cross. Not at all, friends. And it's nothing that we've done of our own selves. It's what Christ did for us. The Bible says in Colossians 1:12 that "God made us worthy." It's not our own goodness. It's what God did for us.

I remember that story that Brother Hagin told. Kenneth Hagin, you all know him. He saw Jesus several times in his lifetime. He's still alive. But he told about the first time that he saw Jesus. He fell down. He was overwhelmed with emotion. And he fell down on his face. You can imagine. Just lying flat on the ground. And he said, "I put my hands on Jesus' feet and then I put my forehead on my hands." And I began to cry out, "I'm not worthy, Jesus. I'm not worthy, Jesus. I'm not worthy to be in Your presence. I'm not worthy to look on Your face." And Jesus spoke to him in a sharp military command. He said, "Son, stand up." And Brother Hagin stood up. He thought he was in trouble, you know. He stood up. And Jesus spoke to him sternly. He said, "Son, you are worthy. You are worthy because I shed My blood to make you worthy." See, friends, it's nothing we've done, but God has made us worthy. (Applause)

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:10, that you are God's very own workmanship. One version says you are God's very own design. You were made in the image of God. You think God's going to come back and criticize you? If you've got those feelings of guilt and unworthiness and shame, they are not from God. God loves you. He values you so much. You are His most prized possession. You've got to understand that.

I told you that incident--the first time I ever spoke up here--about when I was in India one time with my dad. He was conducting a meeting. We didn't have a meeting to go to this particular night. We were staying down on the southern tip of India, right there on the water, on the Indian Ocean. And this night around dusk, I decided to go out and take a walk. I went out to the beach and it was a beautiful, beautiful beach. And it had palm trees for miles and miles this way. And it had some cliffs on this side. And the waves were hitting up against it. And it was really quite a spectacular setting. And here I am halfway around the world by myself. And I just began to think about God. The sun began to go down and it turned out to be a really magnificent sunset. That sun on the horizon, it got 40 or 50 times bigger than it normally is. And the clouds were rippled up in the sky. And they began to show all the different colors, the reds and oranges and pinks. And I sat down to watch it. And I couldn't help but think about God. It was such a magnificent sunset.

And I just said something inside. I said, "God, You're such a wonderful painter. God, You're such a beautiful painter. That is an awesome painting." It just struck me that He was a great painter. And as I sat there, God spoke something to me. Just inside, I didn't hear anything audibly. I just felt the impression. God said, "Joel, you think I'm a pretty good painter?" I said, "Yeah, God, I think You're an awesome painter. This is an incredible painting." He said, "Joel, what do you think My most prized painting would be? What do you think the painting that I'm the most proud of?" And I said, "I think it'd be this, God. This is a beautiful, magnificent sunset." He said, "No, Joel, it's not that." And I began to think about other things. I thought about the Rocky Mountains that I'd seen. That was quite majestic. And He said, "No, Joel, it's not that." And I thought about maybe it's something simple like the fall leaves outside my house when they turned reds and greens and oranges and browns and yellow; and the light comes through and hits it just perfect. And man, it's so pretty. And He said, "No, Joel, it's not even that." Finally, I said, "I give up, God. What is it? The Milky Way? The solar system?" He said, "No listen, Joel, if you want to know the painting that I'm the most proud of, My most prized painting, it would be you." And I thought "Me, God? Over all this stuff?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "Joel, the sunsets are a dime a dozen." He said, "The Milky Way, that's no problem." He said, "I didn't

make those things in My image. I made you in My image." He said, "I breathed My life into you." (Applause)

You see, friends, when you think about God. He went on to say, "Joel," He said, "if you're really talking about painting, do you know what you'd be, Joel?" I said, "What?" He said, "You'd be My very own masterpiece." See friends, you've got to have that kind of feeling. You've got to know that's the way God feels about you. He sees you as His very own masterpiece. Do you think He's going to criticize you and condemn you and bring up your past? Certainly not! Satan is the accuser of the brethren.

Don't give into that. Don't let your past stop you from being what God wants you to be.

See, Isaiah 1:18 says that "though your sins be as a great big purple stain," in one translation. If you have kids, you know grape juice is the hardest thing to get off. "Though your sins be as a great big purple stain, God's will wash you white as the freshly fallen snow."

And if Satan comes to you and starts bringing up your past, you resist him in the name of Jesus. I like to tell him a lot of time, "Satan, if you want to talk about the past, let's talk about your past." I remind him all the time. "Satan, how could somebody be so ignorant and foolish as you to get kicked out of heaven?" You know? I tell him all the time. "Just because you're a loser, just because you've made tremendous mistakes, don't try to bring that junk upon me. Take it somewhere else." (Applause)

You know what you can tell him, "Satan if you don't leave, instead of talking about the past, we're going to talk about your future. Because your future looks absolutely drastic too."

So, friends, listen, here's what I want you to see today. God is not the one that condemns you. If you've made mistakes in the past, get up and go on and don't let that stop you from being your best for God. Don't get on the sidelines. Don't quit coming to church. Don't quit being involved. Go on like never before. The Apostle Paul said, "to forget the things of the past and press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

You know, if you make a mistake, you run quickly to God. Repent of it. Ask for His forgiveness and you're guaranteed that the debt has already been paid. And then God doesn't have any memory of it whatsoever. Friends, you can all win the battle of the mind. It's taking place right here. Don't give the devil any foothold in the area of your mind.

If you would bow your heads in prayer with me, please. I want to talk to those that are viewing by television. I just want to give them an opportunity. If you've never accepted Jesus into your heart, it's a very simple prayer you have to pray. You just have to mean it. The Bible says, "if anybody calls on the name of the Lord, they would be saved." So today, if you don't know you're right with God, just say this after me. Say, Jesus, come into my heart. I repent of my sins. I ask You to come in and be the Lord of my life.

Listen, if you prayed that simple prayer, all you need to do is mean it from the bottom of your heart. And now you ought to get in a good church. If you can come out here to Lakewood, we'd love to have you. If you can't, go to a good church in your area. There are plenty of great churches in Houston and I know there are some good churches in your area. But if you can, come out here and see us, if not, until this time next week, God bless you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 7"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_007 – 6/27/99
(3 Things to do to not Faint)**

DODIE: We welcome you today to our broadcast. We're so glad that you've joined us. And I have a scripture that I think is so good. It's in John 14. This is the Living Bible, the 21st verse. "The one who obeys Me is the one who loves Me." You know if you love Jesus, then you're going to want to obey Him. "And because He loves me, My Father will love him and I will too, and I will reveal Myself unto him." We've got God the Father loving us, His Son Jesus; and Jesus will reveal Himself to us if we love Him and we are obedient to Him. And I want Him to reveal Himself to me and I know you do too. And so all the people said? Amen. And this is my son and I'm proud of him and he's going to bring you a good message today. (Applause)

JOEL: Well I'm glad to see everybody here today. It's always a joy and an honor for me to share God's word. And I love seeing this building fill up. I mean it just shows to what a testimony of the kind of church Daddy built. Doesn't it?

Well it family day and we're especially glad to have all the kids in here that are normally not here and the parents and teachers. And I'm especially glad to have my little boy Jonathan and my family. Victoria, come up if you would. I like to show off my family. I take every opportunity I can. This is little Jonathan. And this is my beautiful wife, Victoria, I'm so proud of. I've been married to her for 12 years. I think I've got the prettiest wife in the world. Men, you better think the same thing about yours. I found this is the one area God allows us to lie about. (Laughter) No listen. (Boo!) This is my little jewel, Alexandra, 7 months old. I thank the Lord she looks just like her momma and not her daddy. (Laughter)

But this is Jonathan. He knows so many scriptures. And I asked him if he'd share a scripture today. And I found the best thing that I can do is bribe him with something. I'm going to give you this and if you won't talk, you talk, you can say something. Say that scripture, if you want to. And if not—it's going to take him awhile. Go ahead, buddy; go. Okay. (Laughter) Listen; let me tell you a story. I've got so many stories about Jonathan. He keeps us laughing at our house. You know somebody said this weekend that kids keep you young, but first they make you old. (Laughter)

But Jonathan one day when he was about two, his favorite word was "mine." Mine, m-i-n-e. He went around the whole house asking, "Daddy, is this mine? Is this mine? Is this mine?" And there was this particular day, he led me all through the house and I wanted to watch the ball game. So he took me to like 20 or 30 different objects, you know anything he could reach: the chair, the couch, the rug, anything. And finally I picked him up because I knew that was going to take forever and I carried him around the house and I said, "Jonathan, everything in this room's yours. Everything in this room's yours." I took him outside and I showed him that—I wanted him to feel real secure that he owned everything around there, everything was his. And finally he seemed pretty happy and so we came back in. I sat down on the couch to watch the ballgame and it wasn't 15 or 20 seconds later, he came back up and he said, "Daddy." I thought, Here we go again. I said, "What Jonathan?" He said, "Is this couch mine?" I said, "Yes, Jonathan; it's yours." He said, "Daddy." I said, "What?" He said, "Get off my couch." (Laughter) Oh! He hadn't repented for that yet, has he? (Laughter)

But listen families are important to us here at Lakewood Church. And I want to take this time to brag on our children's church. I'm sure I'm a little bias, but I think it's the, one of the greatest children's churches in America. And I just—amen. (Applause) I challenge all of you to get your kids in there, take advantage of it. It's not—you know it's shame on us as parents if we're not responsible enough to get our kids into a children's church after all they have to face. And some of you watching by TV, you might not even, you may not even like my preaching. There may be something wrong with you. But you ought to come at least for your kids. (Laughter) Okay.

All right, y'all ready to study the Bible. Let's hold it up. Say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) God bless you.

SERMON: Please open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, chapter 12.

I want to share with you again today on, "Winning the Battle of the Mind." It is so important that we realize and that we understand that we are in a spiritual warfare. I know I say it every week, but we must fully comprehend this that there's a battle going on all around us. And obviously it's not taking place in the physical world. It's taking place in the unseen or spiritual world. If you stretch it, you could even say it's taking place in the mental realm. And I'm amazed at how many people in 1999 do not believe that there's any spirit forces that are working against us. So many people, one, they don't believe it. There's another group of people that try to hide their heads in the sand and think that by ignoring the fact that they're in a battle that the enemy will leave them alone. But friends, this just brings a grin to the face of our enemy because he knows there's somebody he can take advantage of.

Listen to this scripture in 1st Peter 5:8 in the Amplified. "Be well balanced, sober minded and vigilant, cautious at all times. For that enemy of yours the devil, roams around like a lion roaring in fierce hunger, seeking someone to seize and devour."

It's pretty descriptive, isn't it? Think of those two phrases there: "Be cautious at all times" and "Your enemy is seeking someone to seize and devour." Do you know why he has to seek someone? That's because he cannot devour everyone. He's got to find somebody that doesn't know their rights and privileges about what God has done for them. He's got to find somebody that doesn't know how to exercise their authority over the enemy. He's got to find somebody that is ignorant of the way the enemy works. Sometimes we've heard this so much about we have an enemy. We say, "Yeah, yeah, Joel, I know we have an enemy. I've heard that. But you know, the devil's busy. He's not concerned about me. We've got a good relationship. If I leave him alone, he'll leave me alone." A lot of times people think of the enemy as sort of like somebody like Saddam Hussein. Somebody that's far, far away. He doesn't

directly affect me. Somebody else will take care of him. There's nothing that I really need to do. I'll keep up with him in the newspapers or so.

But friends you know your enemy, the Bible says, is individually trying to devour you. And I want to get that point across that we need to be cautious at all times. And I know there's really millions and millions of Christians that don't take any precaution whatsoever. So many people don't put forth any effort to find out just how does this enemy try to destroy me? What kind of weapons does he use? What kind of a battle plan does he have? What is he fighting me with?

You see, if somebody's out to destroy and devour me, I'm sure you're like I am. You want to know everything you possibly can about that person.

Satan cannot be everywhere at one time. He is not like God. He is not omnipresent. God, through His marvelous Holy Spirit, can be in all of our lives. He can be all around the world at one time. Satan is not like that. And so many people tend to think, "Well, Satan is too busy. He's going to bother with somebody of much more importance than me. He's not concerned with me. He's going to find somebody that has more influence than me."

But friends, I don't want us to be deceived that easy. Because the Bible says that when Satan was cast out of heaven, he took with him one-third of the angels and these became his servants. Now, today on this earth, there are millions and millions of evil spirit forces that Satan is in charge of. He is their commander-in-chief and he is actively dispatching them throughout the spirit world. And I know that sounds kind of far out to some people. But friends, we're in a battle. Whether it sounds far out or not, that's what the Bible teaches.

Listen to this scripture in Ephesians 6:12 in this certain translation: "Our fight is not against any physical enemy, but against all the various powers of evil that hold sway in the darkness around us; against spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil."

Sounds like a Star Wars movie almost, doesn't it? Listen and I don't say any of that to scare you or to alarm you or to get you fearful at all. But rather to enlighten you as to the incredible importance of standing guard individually over your life. The Bible basically says that Satan is like a starving lion that's looking for food. And it just so happens to be that you are the food that he's looking for. You've got to stand cautious at all times.

But thank God for the Good News. I don't want to dwell on him too much. The good news is that Jesus, two thousand years ago, totally and completely defeated this enemy. One version says that He rendered him powerless, He rendered him harmless concerning the way he would fight against us. God spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly.

And you know, it almost sounds too good to be true. You say, "Well, Joel, then what are we talking about a battle for?" Well, the reason why is because Satan does not accept defeat that easily. Even though he is totally and completely defeated, he will continue to try to deceive you throughout this whole lifetime into believing that he has power over you. When yet he is totally and completely defeated. Now, unfortunately, what Satan does, he does very well. When he tries to deceive us. He

is not an amateur. He's a seasoned pro that's been working and experimenting on mankind for centuries and centuries and centuries.

And I've said many times, the only access the enemy has into your life is the access that you give him, that he deceives you into believing. The only way he gets into our life is through our mind. It's through our thought life. Yet you control that doorway. How I want to challenge you to stand guard over that doorway. Satan knows that by effecting the way we think he can manipulate and control our personality, our emotions. He can even keep us in bondage.

And I've dealt with quite a few people over the last five or ten years. Being a preacher's kid, a lot of people would share with me their problems and I would dare say that 99% of the people that I dealt with that had major problems, they all originated from a lie from Satan. They all originated right here where Satan deceived them into getting into divorce or jealousy or adultery or many different areas. But had they known that it was Satan playing with their mind, they could have avoided these big mishaps in their life. What happened? They didn't stand guard. They weren't cautious at all times. They weren't aware of how the enemy worked.

Second Corinthians 2:11 says: "Don't be ignorant of the schemes of the enemy."

We've studied before how that original word from the Greek means something like "don't be ignorant of the devil's mind-oriented strategy." The devil works in the area of our mind. And we've been studying this for six or seven weeks and I want us to pick up another point today. It's in Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 3. Take a look at that. It's talking about Jesus. It says, "Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest you grow weary and faint in your mind."

The first place you lose the victory is in your mind. That is the most common and easiest way to give into the enemy—to grow weary and faint in your mind. Many of you today are believing the promises of God. You're holding on to something that God's told you. You're believing for loved ones to come in. We've all got big hopes and dreams. But what happens is the enemy begins to come and bombard our minds with these negative thoughts. And if we are not careful, it will be easy to grow weary and faint. If the enemy can get you to begin to try to figure out how your problem is going to be resolved by your own human reasoning, then you're on the wrong track. It's too easy to give in and faint if you do that. And friends, we don't have to grow weary and faint. We can stand guard. We must stand guard over our minds.

You know, Satan bombards people's minds with suicidal thoughts and many of them faint and give in. It's a real tragedy. Satan bombards people's minds with poverty thoughts. And a lot of them grow weary; they faint. They say, "Well, my grandparents were poor, my parents were poor. I guess God wants me to be poor." But friends, don't grow weary and faint in your mind. It is absolutely imperative that we are cautious every day of our lives and stand guard over our lives. You cannot think poverty and expect to get out of debt. You can't think depression and expect to have joy. You can't think sickness and expect to have health.

You know the Bible says in Proverbs 23:7, basically, "As a man thinketh in his heart so he will become." And this is the way that the enemy deceives us into getting into defeat.

You know even psychologists tell us that our lives move in the direction of our most dominant thoughts. If you continually have thoughts like, "I can't"; "I'll never overcome"; "I'm not able to do it"; "Nothing good ever happens to me"; "Nobody loves me". Friends, your life is going to move in that same miserably negative direction. And it doesn't have to be that way. So many people have lived in this negative mindset for so long that they don't realize that their own thinking is the root cause of most of their problems. Their own thinking. They have this incredible ability to complain or criticize no matter how good a situation is. They can take a perfectly beautiful situation and somehow they can pick out the one negative thing out of it. You all know people like that. If you gave them a dozen roses today, they'd overlook the beautiful rose and they'd look down there and see the thorn on the stem. You know, if God dropped a thousand dollars in some of their laps, the first thing they'd say is, "Where were you God when I needed you? It's about time you showed up." You know what I mean? "God, why didn't you put this in my bank account? Now I've got to go to the bank this afternoon." (Laughter)

I heard Harold tell a funny story the other night at the marriage seminar. He said there were these two farmers. One was a positive farmer and one was a negative farmer. This positive farmer, he thanked God for everything. When it rained he said, "Thank you, Lord, for the beautiful rain, for the great rain that's watering my crops. I'm not even having to use my own irrigation system. I'm going to have a great harvest, Lord." And sure enough, the negative farmer would show up and he'd say, you know, "What do you think about all this rain? If it doesn't quit raining, it's going to rot all of our plants and we're not even going to have a harvest." When the sun would come out, the positive farmer would raise his hand, "Thank you, Lord, for the sunshine. My plants are getting the nutrients and the vitamins they need." And here comes the negative farmer and he'd say, "Man if this sun keeps up, it's going to scorch the plants. It's going to burn up the plants." And just always negative.

And one day, these two farmers decided to go duck hunting. And the positive farmer had bought him a grand new dog. It was a pure blooded retriever. He was so proud of it. And so, anyway, they were out in a boat, the two farmers and the dog. And some ducks flew over and boom, boom; they shot some ducks about 50 yards away. And that positive farmer just couldn't wait; he turned to his friend, he said, "Watch what this dog can do." He said, "Sick 'em, boy." That dog jumped out of the boat and ran on top of the water miraculously and picked up both ducks. And turned around and ran back on top of the water and set them perfectly down in the boat. And then the dog sat perfectly down and got ready for the next one. That positive farmer was smiling from ear to ear. He said, "What in the world did you think of that?" And that negative farmer said, "Just what I thought, that sorry dog can't even swim." (Laughter)

You know, if you want to be negative, you can be negative about anything. I heard Joyce Meyer say that she was so negative if she had two positive thoughts come to her in a row, her mind would cramp. (Laughter)

But listen, what I want us to see today is we need to realize where those thoughts come from. Three things you need to do when negative thoughts come your way. Very simple, but I want y'all to listen carefully. This can change your life, I believe. Number one, you've got to recognize where those thoughts come from. If you get a distinctively negative thought into your mind that brings fear, brings worry, brings anxiety, or even causes you to want to be critical or sour, you've got to realize that

thought is not your own; that thought is coming from the enemy. If you get a thought that makes you upset or gets you uptight or disturbs you, that is Satan trying to infiltrate your life through your mind. We must realize how he works. And friends, if you can't decide where the thoughts come from, you will never wage a winning warfare against the enemy because you will always be confused.

You've got to know which thoughts are your own, which thoughts are the enemy, and you've got to know even when God's speaking to you. You know, God speaks to your spirit and it comes up to your mind. You've got to be able to recognize that. So, the first thing you've got to do is recognize where those negative thoughts come from.

The second thing you've got to do is to reject that thought immediately. Reject that thought immediately. Don't think about it for five or ten minutes and start to try to figure out in your own human reasoning: What if this is the truth? What if that pain is cancer? Well, just how am I going to pay for my kid's college tuition?

Don't give it any thought. Listen to this. The longer you dwell on a lie from the enemy, the more likely you are to be deceived. The longer you dwell, the more likely you are to be deceived. There's no need to dwell on his lies for five or ten minutes even. You need to deal with each thought individually and deal with it immediately. There's no need to let him set up a stronghold in your mind. If you go a day or two or a couple weeks or a couple months thinking about something, man, you've made it so much harder on you than it has to be. Don't make it any harder on you. Deal with that thought immediately. It's almost like taking preventative maintenance like you do with your car. Don't wait till you have a big, you know, a big engine problem. If you deal with each thing as it comes up, God will help you to win the victory.

Number one is to recognize where the thought comes from. Number two is to reject the thought immediately. And number three is to replace that thought instantly with the Word of God. You've got to replace it instantly. It's not enough to recognize where the thought comes from. And it's really not enough just to reject that thought because when you reject that thought, your mind's wide open. Do you know what happens? Five seconds later another thought comes. It'll be a never-ending cycle. You have to learn to once you reject that thought to fill your mind with God's word.

We've talked a lot about meditating on God's word, thinking about the goodness of God, the mercy of God. Just, you know, meditating means to ponder, to imagine, to say the same things over and over again. The best defense is a good offense. Get God's word in your mind and it'll drop down into your heart. You know, Joshua 1:8 says: "This book of the law (or this Bible) shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night; then you will make your way prosperous, then you will have good success."

The book of Psalms says, Psalms, chapter 1: "Blessed is the man that doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, but his delight is in God's word and in God's word does he meditate day and night."

Friends, we're in a spiritual warfare. The enemy's coming against us. You will never win in this warfare if you can't recognize his lies and if you don't reject them immediately. And then if you don't fill your mind with God's word. And I know some of you today are facing tremendously difficult situations. I don't want you to ever

think that you know I think--sometimes it's easy to say, "Oh, that sounds so easy." But listen, it's a simple truth. And if I can challenge you to grasp hold of it and to understand how to defeat the enemy in the area of your mind, I promise any one of you in here that God will give you supernatural victory. He will give you supernatural victory.

And I think about—I use myself often, but I can promise you this truth will work. Because in the darkest hour of my life, I've shared with you before, in the process of my dad's death, do you know what I did? I did this exact same thing that I'm talking about today. I recognized the evil thoughts or the negative thoughts that came into my mind about that situation. And I rejected them immediately. I refused to worry. I refused to act on fear. I refused to answer the question, you know, that came into my mind. What if this happens? What if that happens? I refused to let him try to use my own human reasoning to see how a situation was going to be resolved. I said, "No, devil, I command you to leave." And I just put my trust and confidence in God. I knew that He was still on the throne. I knew He would see us through. And you know what? In my darkest hour, God gave me victory. He gave me a supernatural peace and a supernatural victory. (Applause)

And I know some of you say, "Well, Joel, is that victory? Your dad went on to heaven." Yeah, listen, daddy lived 77 good years. He preached the Gospel for 60 years. And you know, the enemy would love to see me—daddy was my friend, he was my hero, he was my best friend. The enemy would love to see me right now sitting at home sulking, blaming God, having a pity party, all bent out of shape. But you know what? No way. I refuse to listen to the lies of the enemy. (Applause) I refuse to let him infiltrate my life through my mind. I've got that doorway guarded. And I want to challenge you to do it too. The Bible says if you keep your mind stayed on God, He will keep you in perfect peace regardless of the situation.

And you know I was driving here this morning. And I was thinking about how God has supernaturally helped us all through this transition. I mean my dad; he was a great leader. He was a powerful man of God. You know, he was our spiritual leader, our, my earthly father, but surely your father in the faith. And I was thinking about many of the critics said we'd never make it without him. But when I look around today and see this building almost more full than ever, it proves them wrong. (Applause) See, we proved them wrong. You know why? Because God really is in control. Our trust and confidence is in Him.

But what I want you to see today is when these negative thoughts come your way, friend, you've got to stand guard right then. Don't dwell on that. When you get that thought about, you know, maybe you're kids aren't ever going to come off of drugs; or your parents aren't ever going to be saved; or you're never going to get that promotion at work. No, listen; don't dwell on that for two or three seconds. You recognize where it comes from. Don't run to somebody and say, "Oh, I'm all concerned. I need prayer." Friends, you've got to learn how to stand on your own two feet and recognize that's the enemy coming against you. And put your shoulders back. And say, "Listen, Satan, I recognize your lying, stinking, deceiving voice, and I command you to get out of here." You know, I ask him all the time, "How long are you going to keep coming back to me. How hard headed are you, Satan? When are you going to realize that I'm never going to give into your lies? You might as well go find somebody else." (Applause)

You just resist him in the name of Jesus. And the Bible says he has to flee. But don't stop right there. Then your mind's wide open. Then you've got to fill your mind with God's word. And I like to do it in the form of praise. I just say, "Father, I thank you and praise You that the greater One lives on the inside of me. And that you always cause me to triumph. Father, I thank you that no weapon formed against me will prosper because I'm more than a conqueror. And I thank you Father, Your word says that when my enemy comes against me one way, you will defeat the enemy for me and cause it to flee seven different ways. And I just thank the Lord that you know it's not by might, it's not by power, but it is by His spirit that He is seeing me through."

And see friends, I challenge you to do that every time the enemy comes against your mind with a negative thought. Don't let it build up and become a stronghold and be something you've got to take care of a month or two later. Do it individually and do it immediately. Some of you I know say, "Joel, man, if I did that every time he came against me, then I'd be doing it all day long as much as he comes against me." But listen friends that's fine. Do it all day long and I'll tell you what's going to happen: One day you're going to wear that sucker out. He's going to get sick and tired of coming back to you. (Applause)

One day he's going to get sick and tired of coming back to you and you reminding him of his defeat and getting you all stirred up in the things of God. And he's going to say, you know what, I'm not going back that way anymore. I'm going somewhere else.

See, friends, God is not pleased when we are so easily misled by the lies of Satan. That does not please God. You can imagine. He must shake his head in disbelief. I can imagine him saying, "My goodness. I sent my Son down there to totally defeat this enemy. When are they going to ever realize that it is him that is filling their minds with lies and fear and holding them back from enjoying the abundant life that I've planned and I've purposed for them?"

See, we've got to all guard our own minds. I'm the only one who can do it for my life. You've got to stand guard. And you know what? I'm going to tell you this. Every one of you has the power to do it. Don't ever let him convince you that you know you're not worthy or you're not qualified or you hadn't been saved long enough. Listen, a born again believer that's been born again for five minutes has just as much God-given right and authority to resist the devil in the name of Jesus as somebody that's been born again for 50 years. You've got the power to do it. You've got the power to do it. It has nothing to do with how you feel. It has everything to do with what God has done for us. It has nothing to do with who I am or who you are. It has everything to do with whose we are. We're children of the Most High God. It has nothing to do with where we are. It has everything to do with where He is. The greatest power in the universe lives on the inside of every one of us.

So I challenge you today, like I said earlier, all of you have big hopes and dreams. You're holding on to the promises of God. Don't grow weary and faint in your mind. That's the easiest place to lose the victory. You've got to recognize when those negative thoughts come against you. And then recognize where they're from. Reject them immediately. And then replace them with the word of God. We are in a spiritual warfare. Satan's going around trying to seize us, trying to devour us. I want us all to stand guard. Don't give him any access. Don't let him deceive you into having any access into your life through your mind. You control that doorway and every one of

you can do it. Be cautious at all times. I guarantee you we will win the battle of the mind. Amen?

Would you bow your heads in prayer, please? I'd like to talk with the television audience before we leave. And just give you an opportunity. If you've never made Jesus the Lord of your life, I want to give you the opportunity to pray a simple prayer. You know you don't have to make it real complicated. If you just mean it from the bottom of your heart. God will save you and turn your whole life around. Just mean it from the bottom of your heart. Say, Jesus, come into my life. Save me now. I repent of my old sins. And Jesus, I promise to serve You all the days of my life. Jesus, You are now my Lord.

Listen, friends, I believe that if you did that, you ought to get in a good church. Let them disciple you. If you can, we'd love to have you to join us out here at Lakewood. You'll meet some great loving, caring people. And we will disciple you in the things of God. But if not, find a good church in your area and support that church. Until this time next week, God bless each and every one of you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 8"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #022, 7/11/99

DODIE: We welcome you today to the television broadcast. I have a letter from Sylvia Garay who does our book and tape orders here at the church. She's wonderful. She said, "This is an awesome report because we have an awesome God. Last week a lady called to ask about ordering Joel Osteen's tapes and she was crying in gratitude for what Jesus had done through Joel's teaching." Now here's my son, our son, who has not been preaching but about 4 months now. Never preached in his life. And we are so proud of him. I think it's tremendous. "Her son had been almost like a vegetable and no one has been able to get a response out of him. The mother had the Lakewood program on and Joel was speaking on, "Winning the Battle of the Mind." When her son heard Joel, he suddenly got up and walked over to the TV and sat listening to the entire teaching. She told me crying, 'You just don't understand what a big miracle this is. No one has been able to get any response out of my son until now, until this young man preached.'" (Applause) Then she goes on to say. Let me very quickly tell you. She goes on to say, "Doctors have been calling and Christian psychologist have been wanting his tapes on winning the battle of the mind. And one of the psychologist said, 'My patients have been calling and telling me to watch Joel Osteen's series. So I have.'" (Applause) I'm proud of my children. I'm proud of Joel. I'm proud of them all. They have helped me to keep on going and to help you to keep on going too. So come here and let me give you a hug. (Applause)

JOEL: Listen, people write me good letters all the time. And this is the first time I heard that one. But I got a--it's funny she mentioned that because I got a funny letter. People send me interesting letters, funny letters; and I want to share it with you. I guess because I use humor, they want to tell me things. But listen to this. It has no religious value at all, but I want to share it with you. (Laughter) The best time to share it is now. I don't know anything else to say.

Honk if you love Jesus. The wife of a Southern Baptist preacher talks to her Sunday school class about what a wonderful religious experience she had last week. "The other day I went to the local Christian Bookstore and saw a "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker. I was feeling particularly sassy that day because I had just come from a thrilling choir performance at the church. I then bought that bumper sticker and put it on the back of my car. And I'm so glad I did because there was a truly uplifting experience that followed. I was stopped at the light of a busy intersection just lost in thought about the Lord. And I did not notice that the light had changed. It's a good thing that someone else loves Jesus or I may have noticed that the light changed. (Laughter) I found out that lots of people love Jesus. (Laughter) Why the guy behind me started to honk like crazy and then he leaned out of his window and he screamed, 'For the love of God, go lady; go!' Everyone was honking so much, I leaned out my window and waved and I smiled to all those loving people. And I even honked my horn a few times to share in the love. (Laughter) A couple of people were so caught up in the joy of the moment that they got out of their car and they were walking toward me. (Laughter) I bet they wanted to ask what church I attended or if they needed prayer. But that's when I realized the light had changed. I waved one more time to my loving brothers and sisters, and drove through the intersection. And to my amazement, I was the only one that made it through. (Laughter) I felt kind of bad to leave them after all that love we shared. So

I slowed the car down, leaned out the window, and waved at them one more time. Praise the Lord for such a wonderful experience. Honk if you love Jesus." (Laughter)

Hold up your Bible. Let's make our confession.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen. (Amen.)

SERMON: Amen. God bless y'all. Y'all sound good. I'm not going to have you open your Bible to any particular scripture just right away. I'm going to quote something to you today. I was just praying earlier this week. And I was asking the Lord what He wanted me to share with you. I see all the thousands and thousands of people here and I'm amazed. And I'm just thrilled that y'all take the time out of your busy schedule to put God first in your life. And I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to do my part. I know God's given me this opportunity and I take it seriously. And I know some of you face battles in life. I mean we all do. The apostle Paul said to "fight the good fight of faith." And I know some of you have challenges. And you need a touch from God today. And so knowing that, I was just praying this week. I said, "Lord, I've been talking about "Winning the Battle of the Mind" and "Guarding the Mind" all these weeks. Do you want me to continue to talk on this same subject?" It seems like every time I go back to study God's Word, He brings me right back to this same subject. So I want to encourage you to listen carefully. The Bible talks about having ears to hear. And really folks, you need to know this subject and be so convinced in this subject that not only do you know it for yourself, but you can teach other people the same thing.

And you know today's message is kind of different. You know I almost felt a little uncomfortable sharing it at first. But you know I promised the Lord after daddy died that anything He gave me I would share with you today. So I want you to listen carefully to what we get into in a minute.

We've been talking about how the book of Ephesians, Chapter 6, tells us that we are in a spiritual warfare. There's a battle going on all around us. It's not in the physical world, obviously. It's taking place in the unseen spiritual world. You can even say it's going on in the mental realm. And your enemy has already been totally and completely defeated. Jesus took care of him. The only power that he has is the power that he deceives you into thinking he has over you. That's why the Bible talks about "don't give any place to the enemy." Don't give him any place in your mind. And friends, I promise you this, if you can learn to defeat the enemy in the area of your mind, you can win the battles of life. You can overcome in any situation. I don't care what you're going through or what faces you in the future. If you can just learn to win in this area.

And what we must understand is that God does not work on our mind when we get born again. When we accept God's free gift of salvation, when we make Jesus the Lord of our life, the Bible talks about in 2nd Corinthians 5:17 that He makes us a new creature. The Holy Spirit infuses the life of God into our spirit man; it's made alive, it's made new to God. But God doesn't do anything to our physical body or to our mind. He leaves those areas up to us. It's up to us to take care of those areas. And it just so happens that the area of your mind is an area of tremendous importance. Because if you think about it, everything that you are, everything that you say, every action that you take, it's a direct result of you first thinking about it in your mind. And isn't it interesting that the enemy's favorite place to work is in our mind. Jesus called Satan in John 8:44 the "father of lies and all that is false." And so, you know, I don't believe Satan can touch your spirit man but he can, if you allow him and only if you allow him, he can affect your life, your emotions, your personality, your attitudes. He can affect that through your mind, through your thought life. That's why we've been talking about guarding your thought life.

When I first started studying on this subject several months, usually one of the first things I do is go get some of my dad's transcripts and I read them and see what his thoughts were on it. And that's where I got the statement I've quoted almost every time that "the only entrance that the enemy has into your life is through your mind." And when I first read that, I thought, "Wow, what a powerful statement. Could that be true? That the only way the enemy can get to us is through our mind?"

And I immediately thought about physical sickness and disease. See, normally when we think about winning the battle of the mind, we think about overcoming in areas like, you know, emotional and mental areas. Like fear, worry, anxiety, and depression. I began to ask myself the question this week, you know, is it possible for us to allow Satan to bring sickness and disease upon to our lives by deceiving us in the area of our mind? In other words, can we give the enemy a place in our mind and open up the door to where he can bring physical sickness and disease? And I thought, you know, that's kind of an interesting thing. And I wanted to learn more about it. And I started to study God's Word and research some scriptures. And I even called my sister, Lisa, and I said, "Lisa, what do you think about this statement daddy made? And what do you think about this?" And Lisa gave me her theological explanation, and I got to tell you, it didn't help me too much--(Laughter)--to be real honest with you. And then I thought about calling my mom. And then I thought, "No, I know as much as she knows." (Laughter) I'm just lightening y'all up a little bit.

But listen. What I thought I would do I thought, you know, when all else fails, ask the Lord. You know? Most of the time we leave Him as a last resort. But I thought, you know, I was praying this weekend. I said, "Lord, is that possible?" You know I just opened up my heart to Him. And I said, "Is it possible that we as good born again believers can allow the enemy to deceive us in the area of our mind, in the mental area, and open the door to physical sickness and disease?" And the Lord spoke something back to me. I didn't hear Him audibly. I'm not going to tell you that. But He just impressed upon me something right here. And here's what He said to me in my own words. He said, "Joel, my people don't understand how much they control their own destiny. They don't realize how many times they limit My power, they limit My protection, and they limit My blessings by listening to the lies of the enemy." And two scriptures came to my mind immediately. The first one was James 1:17. It says that, "every good and perfect gift comes from the Father above." If we've been around here very long, you know God doesn't send sickness and disease.

We can eliminate Him. He is not the author of sickness and disease. But then the second scripture that came to my mind--it just came up right out of me. It is a scripture I hadn't thought of in years and years. I've only heard daddy speak on it one time in his whole lifetime. And it was rather insightful. It was almost a little disturbing. It was Proverbs 26:2. Some of you may know it. But in the King James, just a little phrase of that scripture says, "the curse causeless does not come." "The curse causeless does not come."

And what I believe the Lord was saying to me and He wanted me to share with you today is that we would be surprised at just how many times we do open the door to the enemy and allow him to deceive us in the area of our minds and get us off track in our life, get us out of God's perfect will. And thereby we limit God's divine protection that He has available to us. And you know we open up the door by our own actions to let the enemy bring, not only mental anguish and mental torment, but sometimes even physical sickness and physical disease.

And I told you this was going to be a little bit different. And I want you to listen carefully because I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not saying at all if you're sick today or if you've ever been sick that this is the only way that you've gotten off track and you've opened the door out to the enemy. And you're some kind of great sinner and that's why it came on you. I realize that even little babies are born with sickness and disease. They had nothing to do with that. And at one time in the Gospel, Jesus talked about a man that the reason he had an infirmity was so that the works of God may be manifest in their life. See, I realize there's other ways. And I'm not here--you've got to know the spirit I'm saying this. I'm not here to condemn you or to judge you whatsoever. I want to uplift you. But I do want to challenge every one of you today that when you face physical sickness or physical disease, that the first thing you ought to do is to examine your own life and make sure that you are not the cause of it. Make sure the enemy hasn't deceived you in some way; gotten you off track for your life; and gotten you out of God's supernatural divine protection. How many of you understand what I'm talking about today?

You know you give me the benefit of the doubt. I'm not trying to condemn you but rather expose the way the enemy works. You know the Bible talks about "know his strategies." And I want to challenge you more than ever that I feel compelled to tell you that, you know, you can get off track in your life and you get out of God's divine protection. This opens up the door to all kinds of trouble.

You know I think about a situation that I went through in my own life in 1994. I developed this pain in my side, right here in my left-hand side by my abdomen. And you know it was a dull, achy pain. But you all have had a pain before that just doesn't go away. It's just annoying. Every time I woke up in the middle of the night, this is what I felt. And you know it was really--I play a lot of sports and basketball. I like to lift weights. I figured I just pulled a muscle. Although I'd never done anything up in here before. And I laid off for a couple of weeks. But man it just, it had me so irritated and so irritable, it wouldn't go away.

So I finally called my brother, Paul. He's here with us today. He's a surgeon up in Little Rock. And I explained to him, I said, "Paul, my side's been hurting". And he said, "You know, Joel," he said, "I can't diagnose you over the phone. If it's a muscle, you need to take some Advil and that'll keep the swelling down." And I

thought that's what I did. And Paul told me to take this tremendous amount of Advil, way more than the little bottle told me. And I said, "Paul, are you sure that you want me to take that much Advil?" His favorite line, he says, "Joel, trust me. I'm a doctor." (Laughter) I thought, "Paul, I know you way too well to trust you." I think about all those pranks he played on me when I was little. I thought is he playing with me now? But you know I did what Paul told me to do. And I went three or four days. And an interesting thing happened. God is my witness, that pain moved from my left side to my right side. (Laughter) I thought, "Man, Paul is good. He can move this thing around." (Laughter) But you know I called Paul back. And I said, "Paul, here's what's happened." He said, "You know, Joel, it might not be a muscle." He said, "Your colon runs right through there." He said, "You better go see a real doctor." (Laughter) I was wondering if you all would catch that. (Laughter)

So, anyway, I went to see this gastroenterologist, or gastrientologist, or whatever he was, the guy who works with your digestive system. I went to see him and he said, "Joel, you've got something that's very, very common in people your age. It's not life threatening. Your colon is inflamed and it's due to excessive stress in your life." He said in effect, you're the one bringing it on yourself by the way you eat and by the way you sleep and by the way you exercise. He said, "You've just got to take care of those things and this will go away." And I thought, "Well, that sounds kind of strange because I didn't feel any stress." And a lot of times you're under stress and you don't know it. But he gave me some pills. He said, "Joel, take these pills. You'll be fine. Don't worry about it. It's not life threatening. Go work out."

So, I took these pills. I took two a day for about three or four days. But you know what? The pain didn't go away. And the enemy began to work in the area of my mind. He had me convinced that that doctor surely misdiagnosed me and I had some type of incurable cancer or the pain would have gone away. You know? And I thought, "Man, I can't live like this." And I was letting the enemy just go and go and go. I'm talking about I brought all this on myself.

So, I went back to the doctor in about a week. And I said, "Doctor, the pain didn't go away." He said, "Joel, you're going to be fine. I told you there's nothing we need to do." He said, "If you insist, we'll run some tests." So, I said, "Yeah, I want to run some tests. I want to find out what's wrong with me." And so man, for the next three weeks, we ran about you know a half dozen tests. They probed around on me in areas where the sun doesn't shine, if you know what I mean. (Laughter) Every test came back perfectly normal. My blood work was perfectly normal. You know there was nothing wrong with me. He said, "Joel, I told you that you were normal."

And so I left and I thought, okay, I'm normal. But you know what? The enemy still—I'm just showing you how the enemy works. This is me, not you. But the enemy began to work overtime on my mind. And he said, "Joel, if he diagnosed you right, then the pain would go away. You know, he's only human. They're only human. They could have gotten your tests all mixed up." And it was about that time back in 1994 when we were seeing all those reports on the news about babies that were switched at birth. He said, "Joel, if they can switch a baby, they can surely mess up your test results." And you know, friends, it's kind of funny, since it's my problem and not yours. (Laughter) But it's funny that I went a year of my life thinking that I had some kind of terrible disease on me. The enemy tormented me. I had that pain that whole time. And the more I worried about it, the worse it got. I was bringing it upon myself. And the guys here know. I used to come to work in my running suit

sometimes because my side was swollen. And you know, many times I'd come early in the morning and by noon I was nauseated. This thing was taking over me. I'd have to go home and lay down. You know, and by the time I had, you know after a month or two, I had so much muscle relaxing medicine in me that my personality was about as dull as my mom's there for a while. (Boo!) But you know—let's see; I've gotten Paul, Lisa, and my mom. I only lack April.

But you know what happened? One day something dawned on my. Somebody must have been praying because the thought came to my mind. I'm sure it was the Lord. And this thought came to my mind. It said, "Joel, how long are you going to allow the enemy to keep you in this misery." And the first thing I thought about is what does he mean? Allow the enemy? I'm not allowing anybody. Man, I'm sick. (Laughter) But you know, the more I thought about it and God began to deal with me, I began to realize. A light turned on in my life that I was the one by my own actions that by working all the time, going 90 miles an hour, that I was allowing the enemy to bring this situation on me. Not only that, I was allowing him to exploit the situation in my mind even after the doctor told me that I was fine. I was allowing him to make it bigger than ever. And do you know what I had to do friends? I had to make a decision that I wanted to get out of that situation. Of my own will, I had to say, you know what, I'm going to walk out of this situation. And I knew I had to make some simple adjustments in my own life. It wasn't hard. I could have done this a year earlier. I had to make some simple adjustments in my life and then I had to take care of the enemy. And if there's one that that I learned being the son of John Osteen, that is how to resist the enemy. And I simply came against him. I said, "Listen devil, you have fooled me long enough. You have deceived me long enough. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. I don't ask you to leave. I don't beg you to leave. I don't do it in my name. I command you in the name of Jesus to get out of my life right now." (Applause)

And do you know friends, I walked out of that situation just over a period of another week or two. I walked out of that situation, but I thought, how long could I have gone if I hadn't of, you know, of my own will done something about it? I had to make a change. And you know every once in a while that pain will come back. And the enemy will come to my mind and he'll say, "Joel, I'm back. I'm back and I'm back to stay. It's going to be worse than ever." Do you know what? I don't run and cry and get all frantic and get all worried. I don't go call my mom and say it's back on me. I don't even run and call the 24-hour prayer hotline. As good as prayer is, friends, you've got to understand there's a time to pray and there's a time to stand strong and to resist the enemy in the name of Jesus. (Applause)

See, many good Christian people don't understand that praying is not enough. And I'm a big believer in prayer, but praying does not make the enemy leave. Praying does not keep the enemy away from you. Otherwise, we ought to all stop right now and just pray that the enemy will leave us for the next 25 years. No, friends. And I'm a big believer in prayer. Don't get me wrong. Prayer is vitally important to the Christian life. But it's equally important to learn how to stand up on your own two feet, of your own will, and boldly, forcefully, without any kind of insecurity, or fear, or inferiority to resist the enemy in the name of Jesus. The Bible says if you do this, he'll go instantly. (Applause)

Some of you I know you say, "Joel, if I do that, I'll stir the enemy up. He'll start to work overtime on me." And friends if you think like that, the enemy will keep you in

bondage. Hosea 4:6 says that people are destroyed for thinking like that. They're destroyed for a lack of knowledge. You've got to realize that God has already made a way. The Bible says, "Whom the son sets free is free indeed." God's already made a way for you to be free, to walk out of that bondage. And it's such a pity that so many—and they're good Christian people, they don't know anything about this. And they live a life of defeat in all kinds of bondages, not only mental bondages, but physical bondages when Jesus has already paid the price and made a way for us to be free.

It reminds me of that story my dad used to tell about this man. He lived out in the country. He went and bought him a dog. And when he got home, he put that dog on a leash on the front of his house. And he tied it to a tree. It was about a 15-foot leash. And that dog would see the other animals out in the yard and he would take out after them. There were squirrels and cats and birds and everything out in a country yard. He'd take out after them. But after 15 feet, he'd come to the end of his chain, and you know he would jerk back. And it only took him several times to realize that he had limitations. He could only go 15 feet in any given direction. So, over a period of five or six years, not only did he realize his limitations, but so did all the animals and the other people that lived around there. If they could just stay more than 15 feet away, that dog could bark, he could holler, he could do anything he wanted to do. He could make a lot of noise but he would not harm you. Well, one day the owner was feeling kind of sorry for the dog. He thought, you know I live out here in the country, there's no need to keep that dog chained up. He's not going to go anywhere. So we went out there one morning. And he was simply petting the dog. And he unlatched the collar from the dog's neck area. He didn't take the collar off. He just unlatched it and left it open an inch or two. He was completely free right there. He thought, well, this dog is so robust and healthy. The next time a squirrel comes, he'll just bust through and he'll take after that squirrel. And he'll know freedom like he's never known it before. But you know what happened? You all can guess what happened. That dog didn't realize that he was free. He still felt the collar on him even though it was unlatched. When a squirrel would come, he would go back to the same limitations. And you know, the dog didn't realize if he would only take one step beyond his old limitation that he would know this freedom. He could run out wherever he wanted to be.

And you know I think about it. How many people are in here today? Or how many good Christian people do you know that they are living in bondages when they don't realize that Jesus, their Master, has already made them free? And so many people—
(Applause)

So many people they live in bondages of addictions and habits. Some people live in a bondage of wrong thinking. They think that God doesn't love them, that God doesn't care about them. Or if they are sick that God's surely not going to heal them. They have all these bondages. And if we would only realize that if we go one step further, we could know freedom like we have never known it before in all of our lives.

You say what is that step, Joel? Well, the first thing you've got to do is to make Jesus the Lord of your life. The first thing you've got to do, you've got to turn your life completely over to Him. You can't do it on your own.

The second thing you've got to do is you've got to make a decision of your own will to get out of the situation you're in. You've got to make that decision. Friends, we can

pray for you all day long. But we can't change your will. God will not go against your will. You have to do just like I did. You have to decide to do something about it.

And the third thing you've got to do is you've got to—on your own two legs and with your own mouth, resist the enemy yourself and command him to get out of your life. And I promise you, you will walk free from those addictions.

You see, friends--(Applause) Now, I know some of you here today are facing serious illnesses. And you didn't get a good report like I did. So I don't at all want you to think that I'm trying to again judge you or to condemn you whatsoever. I want to uplift you. But what I do want to challenge every one of you to do is that when sickness or disease or any kind of trouble comes into your life, the very first thing you should do is turn your focus inward. Examine your own heart. Examine your own life. And make sure that somehow that you haven't gotten off of God's best path for your life and somehow have allowed the enemy to bring this upon yourself.

See, I was thinking about my mom. In 1981, when she was diagnosed with cancer of the liver, the first thing she did was to write all of us kids a note asking us to forgive her for anything that she had done wrong, if she had ever hurt us. And you know I'll tell you my mom had never done anything to hurt us. But do you know what she was doing? She was examining her own life. She was saying, God, I want to make sure everything in my heart is pure. I want my heart to be free from any kind of unforgiveness, anything that I've done wrong. She was turning her focus inward and saying, God I don't want to limit Your divine protection and I don't want to limit Your divine supernatural power. And see, God gave her a miracle.

And you don't know how many people write me and they have these same emotions in them. Unforgiveness; they harbor feelings of bitterness, anger. They have hatred in them. And many of them, they have a right in the natural to be angry. Some of you today you may be sour over a relationship that went wrong. Maybe somebody did you wrong. Maybe they were guilty. Some of you may be in here that you were abused when you were smaller. You know, that's not fair, it's not right. In the natural you have reason to have a chip on your shoulder. But you have to realize today, the harboring of that unforgiveness and that anger and that hatred will eat you up inside. And not only that it will open your life up to the enemy. It will open yourself up to the enemy.

And I know, you know, the Bible says, "The curse causeless does not come."

I'm sure God's been dealing with you today about certain addictions and certain habits in your life. And you've been putting it off. Well, friend, I challenge you today to make that change today. Be your best for God. Sure, you're born again. But you're, you know, you're compromising. You're not being all that you can be for God. And some of you, God's maybe has even been speaking to you in just certain areas, only you and God know it. Maybe it's about witnessing to your neighbor or taking care of a situation. And you just keep pushing it down, and pushing it down, and say, "God, I'll take care of it later." But do you know what we're doing? We're opening ourselves up to the enemy. We're getting out of God's perfect will.

You see friends, you can really pray all day long and you can resist and resist and resist, but you need to first deal with these other issues because it sure hinders your prayers from being answered. That's why the book of Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 1,

says, "to lay aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset us" So easily beset us. "And let's run with patience the race that God's put before us."

And I'm convinced, friends, that we would be amazed and surprised at how much of God's supernatural blessings are poured out upon us. I think we'd be amazed at the divine health and healing that comes into our lives. I think we'll be amazed at the supernatural favor that God would pour out upon us if we would simply examine our own lives, purify ourselves, and have a heart that is pure toward God. Consecrated toward God and not going off to the left and off to the right. And God having to get us back on course. But we stay right in the center of God's will. Do you agree with me today? (Applause)

I want to wrap it up by telling you that we're in a spiritual warfare. You control your own destiny. Don't let the enemy deceive you. Stand guard. Be cautious at all times. Don't give into his lies. And by doing that limit God's protection and God's blessings and God's power in your lives. And again, I don't want any of you to go out of here condemned but rather challenged more than ever that you've got to take control of your situation. You've got to guard your life. You've got to stand strong. And you will win the battle of the mind. Amen. (Applause)

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 9"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #09, 7/18/99
(God's Best Path for our Lives)**

DODIE: We welcome you today to our television broadcast and I know you're going to be blessed. Let me read this scripture to you. This is one that kind of might step on some of our toes, but it's in the Bible and it's there for us. Proverbs 12:18 says, "Some people like to make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise sooth & heal." Now I want to be a wise person, don't you? I don't want to make cutting remarks. Sometime I do, but I don't like myself when I do that. So I want to encourage you to make your words sweet because you might have to eat some of them. (Laughter) Don't make your words harsh and cutting because you just might wound somebody's spirit. So I want to talk especially to husbands and wives, and to husbands and wives talking to their children. You can deal with children in a way that is not hard. So just make your words sweet. Amen? And all the people said amen. (Applause)

JOEL: It's good to have everybody here at Lakewood. Let's hold up our bibles. We're going to study God's word together. Let's say it like you mean it now.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen.

SERMON: God bless you all. Please open your bibles to Hebrews, Chapter 12.

Well we've been talking about for the last several months, "Winning the battle of the Mind." And how important it is for us all to guard our thought life. You know by now that we're in a spiritual warfare. And that the enemy's main weapon that he uses against us is deception. And the Lord's been impressing upon me so strongly lately—and I just want to share it with all of you again today—on how important it is for all of us to stay in God's best path for our lives. Now there are many different paths that we can take. And if we're born again, they will get us to heaven. But God specifically has a best path for your life. Now it's up to each and every one of us to seek His face and to be sensitive to His voice. And make sure we stay on that best path. It's up to us to make sure that we don't allow the enemy to deceive us and get us off course to where we never reach the final destination that God has planned for each and every one of our lives.

I heard Lisa quote a while ago Deuteronomy, chapter 28. It talks about if you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God and obey His commands, all these blessings would overtake you. In other words, if you can stay in the center of God's

perfect will, you're going to have so many blessings come upon you that you can't even outrun them.

I was thinking about I've never been so convinced at how many of God's supernatural blessings, how much of His supernatural favor and His supernatural abundance would overtake our lives. How His supernatural healing and divine health would come into our lives. How His supernatural peace and His supernatural strength would overtake us if we'd simply do our part and make sure we're staying right there in the center of God's best path for our lives. Not going off to the left or right, but right there in the best path.

And look at Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 1, please. "Wherefore, seeing we are also compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us and run with patience the race that is set before you."

One version says, "the particular race." Another version says, "Let us run steadily with determination, the course that is mapped out for our lives." We must understand that God has a specific plan and purpose for every one of our lives. God has drawn a blueprint for each day of your lives. See, friends, this is a tremendous thing to understand. If you can really grasp hold that the Creator of the universe, the Almighty God, the One that spoke the worlds into existence, He is so concerned about each and every one of you. He loves you so much. You are so valuable to Him that He personally mapped out a specific course for each of your lives. He obviously knows the best path for us to take to reach our final destination. But it's up to us to make sure that we are sensitive to His voice, that we seek His will, and that we don't go off to the left and right and we don't allow the enemy to get us off course in our lives. See, friends, God's best path for your life may not be the path that looks the most attractive. As strange as this may sound, God's best path may not be the job that pays the most money.

But see the enemy's specialty is to show you a path with an incredibly beautiful entry. Now, think about this. It may have luscious flowers on each side so manicured. It may have spectacular fountains squirting water up in the air down this path. And you look carefully and you say "Man, that's magnificent. Look at this path that God is leading me on. The pavement is paved so carefully." But see we've got to realize that sometimes that's a trick of the enemy. Sometimes, not every time, but many times, quickly out of sight, the road begins to deteriorate into a narrow, bumpy, dirty, trashy road full of potholes, not to mention there's danger on each side. And we think, "Man if we travel down that road," we think, "Man alive, what a deceptive entry that was. It looked so beautiful. If I'd known it was going to turn out like this, I'd never in a million years come down this road."

See we didn't seek God's guidance. And you know what we got to realize is that God is up high. God is looking down. He can see the big picture. We are limited in our vision. We can only see so far. We can only see so much of the road. And every one of us are going to face decisions and forks in the road in our lives. And just as I mentioned, maybe they both have an equally beautiful entryway. It's up to us to seek God's will to know which one to take so that we don't get off course. Because you've got to remember God can see the big picture. He knows which roads just simply circle back around and bring you back to your same point in life. Yet, four or five years of your life have been wasted. God knows which roads, four or five years

down the road, come to a screeching halt and end in a dead end. God knows which road leads to danger. God can see it all. He's got a tremendous advantage. He can see the big picture.

Now, if we continually allow the enemy to deceive us and get us off course, we can literally waste half of our lives having to turn around and come back to the right road. Do you hear what I'm saying today? How many times have I been guilty of it? You don't have to answer. But you know a project comes across my life or across my desk and I think, "Wow, God, this is perfect for me." Maybe it's a relationship. I don't know. Maybe it's a job paying more money. I'm not against you having a job paying more money. But it's something that looks attractive. And it's so attractive we think, "Golly, God, You answered my prayers. I don't even have to pray about this one." And we take off 90 miles an hour only to find out in a couple of years the road comes to a dead end. And we look back and we think "Oh no." Now do you know what we have to do? We have to turn around and we have to go all the way back just to get back to the main course. And what's happened, friends, is we've allowed the enemy to steal valuable precious time from our lives. And you know, friends, time is one of the very few things that you cannot get back. And how the enemy would love for us all to waste our lives and not be everything God wants us to be.

And you know lately, I've never been so convinced at just how the enemy tries to get us off course. And I want to talk about this a little. See, the enemy is not going to—He knows we're not going to commit some heinous crime. He knows that most of us are not going to commit murder or rape somebody. He's smarter than that. He's not going to come and try to get you and I to go rob a bank this afternoon. No friends, it's usually not the big things that get us off course; it's the very small things. But the small things over a period of a lifetime can end up to be huge. See the enemy's not going to come hit you with a ton of bricks and try to knock you into the next county. That would be way too obvious. He carefully and subtly tries to lure you just a little off track in small increments just one step at a time.

And I want to use the young people as an example now. Young people listen to me carefully now. I'm going to use you as an example because I want to show you how the enemy--I want to show you how he works. Young people, the enemy knows how important it is for you to choose the right friends. And he would love to see you get mixed up with the wrong group of friends. And he knows the power of peer pressure. He understands that if your friends are doing something wrong, you're going to feel this incredible force to try to get you to just fit in. Don't be an odd ball. So he'll come to you sometime and he'll give you this lie. He'll say, "You know, it's okay to hang around that group at school that parties all the time. After all they're some of the most popular kids and God wants you to have friends. He wants you to be popular. And even though they do some things wrong every once in a while; even though they smoke a little crack cocaine here; and even though there's a little sexual activity going on that you know is not right; no, don't worry about that, man. You're not going to get involved in that. You're a good Christian. You go to Lakewood, man. You've got the Word of God in you. Don't worry about that kind of stuff. It's okay."

He'll tell you that God probably wants you just to win them all to the Lord. You'll probably end up witnessing to them and getting them all saved. It's okay. Go on with that group. But see, what happens friend is that's a very common, it's a subtle yet very sophisticated lie that the enemy tells our young people.

Do you know that Satan can even quote scriptures? You know that's what he did each time to Jesus when he tempted Him. And young people, he'll come to you and say, "Man, you're covered by the blood of Jesus. A greater power is on the inside of you. No weapon formed against you will prosper." You know. "You have nothing to worry about." And all that is true in a sense. God's Word is true. But what the enemy is doing is he's trying to twist the scripture and to confuse you into thinking maybe that's God talking to you and not the enemy.

Friends, the devil knows more of the scripture than a lot of Christian people. I don't mean that wrong but it's true. He's been around this thing for years and years. One scripture I promise you that he won't quote to you is First Corinthians 15:33. It says, "Don't be fooled; bad company corrupts good character." (Applause)

We're talking about the way the enemy subtly works and tries to get us off track. So young people, he's filled your mind with a lie. What does he do next? Come give you another one and another one? No, he simply sits back to wait. The ball's in your court. He's not going to over load you with another lie. He wants to first see what you're going to do. He doesn't want to draw any attention to himself. Now if you begin to reason. And if, young person, if you don't realize that's the enemy talking to you, that's him lying to you, then you'll begin to think, "Well, God wants me to be the salt of the earth; God wants me to be the light of the world; maybe it's okay." You see what's happening here? You're beginning to agree with the enemy. Now a sarcastic grin is coming on his face. He'll leave you alone until you fully digest that thought. And he'll let you get out there and hang around with that group for a couple of months. And it'll seem like everything's okay. And he'll even tell you, "See it wasn't so bad." But all he's doing is setting you up for the next step he wants to take you to. He says, "Now boys, they're ready for the next step." What's the next step? He tells you, "It's okay to smoke a little crack cocaine. Come on, man. Everybody's doing it. You're a teenager. You're going to miss out on part of life. They're doing it. It's not hurting them." But you know friend, I'm convinced of this. I'll guarantee you the enemy will never show you the end of the road that he's trying to deceive you down. He will never show you that. I'll guarantee you that. Because if he showed you that, you would turn around immediately and get back on course. Because that road's going to end in heartache, misery, suffering, and possibly even an early death. And all of us have seen good people, young people, older people; they're good Christian people. They are not evil; they just simply got deceived. They didn't stand guard. They didn't stay on the best path for their lives. And they end up, you know, young people end up getting hooked on drugs. They end up getting pregnant at an early age. All because they allowed the enemy to get them off course one step at a time.

And young people, I'll tell you to be real frank with you, to be real honest with you, the enemy wants to totally destroy you. He would love to see you end up at the wrong place at the wrong time where all of a sudden there's some type of criminal activity or illegal activity take place. And now all of a sudden you're somehow facing a prison sentence. You're facing a terrible tragedy in your life. I know some people say, "Joel, you're getting this way overboard. You're going too far with it." But you don't know how many good young people I've talked to that have ended up in prison. They are good kids. I can't convince you enough. They are not evil. They just made the wrong decisions. They allowed the enemy to deceive them. And friends, I don't want any of that to happen to our young people. And I'm tired of talking about

the enemy. I want to tell you that I don't believe the devil has a chance with our young people around here. I don't believe he has a chance. (Applause)

You know the Bible says, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard." And I want all the young people, if you're between the ages of 10 and 23, stand up today. I want to show you off. Look what a good group of young people we have. (Applause) Isn't that great?

Listen to me a minute. Remain standing. Let me confess something over you. I believe God's raising up a new generation of young people. And they are not deceived by the enemy. They are not deceived every time they turn around. They are not ignorant of the enemy's devices. They are not whiners. They are not crybabies. They're not always saying, "Why has all this trouble happened to me?" And "Why is the enemy always after me?" No, this new generation, this new army, it's you and it's me. It's all of us. We have such an unshakable confidence in God. We understand our rights and our privileges. We understand our God-given authority in the name of Jesus. We understand that Satan is already defeated 2,000 years ago. We understand that he's under our feet. We understand that there's nothing impossible to us if we only believe. And I believe this new generation, they dare the enemy to come around. They get excited if he comes around because they enjoy slapping him upside the head a couple of times. (Applause)

I believe they enjoy demonstrating their authority over the enemy. That's all of you. That's what I believe for you. But listen, young people, you've got to do your part. You've got to resist temptation. You've got to know when it's the enemy talking to you. And you've got to realize that if the enemy can get you off track in these early formidable years, the results will be much more significant in the future. If you start off early going off track, you'll end up way off track. But I don't believe any of you are. So God bless you. You may be seated. Thank you. (Applause)

But really the trick of the enemy is to get us all off course, not just the young people. You can use that as an example. He just tries to slowly meticulously, subtly, get us all off course so subtly that we look up one day and we don't even realize it. And you know and we look up and we're forty or fifty years old, half of our life is gone and we think, "My God in heaven, what happened to my life? I would have never dreamed I'd end up here when I knew God wanted me there." And the enemy's next favorite lie is to tell you, "Well, there's no use to even going after the things of God. You've messed up so much you might as well just forget about it."

But friends, that's why God's been impressing upon me so much lately, we've got to examine our lives regularly. And seek God's face and listen to His voice and say, "God, am I doing what You want me to do every day of my life? Am I in the center of Your perfect will? Or am I getting off to the left and getting off to the right and having to waste valuable time coming back?"

Listen to this scripture, Proverbs 4:25. Let me quote it to you. "Watch your step closely; stick straight to the path. Don't turn to the right nor to the left; don't get sidetracked. Ponder the path of your feet and your ways will be established."

I'm amazed at how many times we waste valuable years of our lives doing a thousand different things. And listen to me friends; they're all good. They may even be in the name of God. But the problem is they're not what God told us to do. Really

they're weights that are holding us back from receiving the true blessings that God wants to put on our lives. And really a favorite trick of the enemy is to get your mind so cluttered and so confused that you don't have any time to think about God. You don't have any time to meditate on scriptures. And another trick is to get your life so busy with so many extra-curricular activities that you don't have any time for God anymore.

Somebody sent me this story in an email the other day. I want to read it to you. Listen to it. It's very interesting.

Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels, he said, "We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from conservative values. But we can do something else. We can keep them from forming an intimate relationship with Jesus. If they gain that connection, our power over them will be broken. So let them go a church; let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time."

"How can we do this?" shouted the angels. "Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life. Invent schemes to occupy their minds. Tempt them to spend, spend, spend and then borrow, borrow, borrow. Convince the wives to go to work for long hours and husbands to work six or seven days a week so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, soon their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work. Over stimulate their minds so they cannot hear that still, small voice. Entice them to keep the radio, TV, VCR, CDs and PCs going constantly in their home. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ. Pound their minds twenty-four hours a day. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, and mail-order catalogs. Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted, and unprepared for the coming week. And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion. Let them be involved in soul winning but crowd their lives with so many good causes that they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause."

It was quite a convention in the end. And the evil angels went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy, rushing here and there. Has Satan been successful at his schemes? You be the judge. Satan's goal is to take our minds and hearts off Christ then steer us to the cares of the world. If we're too busy for God, then we're too busy.

We're talking about staying right on course for our lives. You know friends, God's best path for your life is not God's best path for my life. So many times we see a Christian being blessed doing something and we rush over there and think well maybe that's what God wants me to do. They're being blessed. And we get out there and try that for a couple of weeks or a couple of months only to get frustrated because that's not what God told us to do. And now we don't get the same results. So we say, well, let's go over here and try this. Or let's go over here and try this. And you know, it ends up we end up spending way too much time spinning our wheels when what we really need to do is to get quiet before the Lord and to seek

His face and ask Him, "God, am I in the center of your perfect will? Am I doing exactly what you've called me to do? Am I in the best path for my life?"

And some of you say, "Joel, well, I asked God but He doesn't seem to ever tell me anything. He doesn't seem to ever speak back to me." Well, what you've got to do friends is you've got to go back to the last time that you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He's told you to do something and you've got to remain faithful in doing what you know He told you to do. See, some of you may have to go back a month. Some of you might have to go back a year. Some of you might have to go back 20 years. But if that's the last time you know that He's told you to do something, well you remain faithful in that.

See, I can use myself as an example because I know beyond a shadow of a doubt in the summer of 1982, when I left college that year that God spoke to me about coming back here to Lakewood Church and starting a television ministry. And I knew that God wanted me to put my dad's ministry all over the world through television. I mean I was just thoroughly convinced of that. Now do you know over the last 17, 18 years, there have been several opportunities that have come across my path. In the natural, they seemed very enticing. It seemed like it might be a good way to go. And do you know what I'd do? I'd pray about it. I'd say, "Lord, is this the direction you'd want me to go?" And do you know every time I never got an answer. I didn't hear "yes." I didn't hear "no." But you know what? I always go back to what I call my default which is in 1982 what I know God told me to do. It's to stay right on course here. It's to stay behind the scenes. And it's to put my dad's ministry on the air.

Well, you know, an interesting happened over the last five or six years. My dad used to always try to get me to come out here and speak to you guys. And you know what? I never wanted to. You all scared me. But you know what? He tried to get me. He'd say, "Man, Joel, those people really love you. You ought to come out here and speak for me." And I'd say, "Daddy, I don't know how to preach, man. You're the preacher." He said, "Well, Joel, we don't have to call it preaching. We'll just call it sharing." And I told him, I said, "Daddy, you can call it preaching, teaching, or sharing, but the point of the matter is nothing's going to disguise the fact that 8,000 people are going to be staring at me for 30 minutes." I said, "I can find other ways to torture myself." I said, "Why did you have to build such a big church, anyway?" But you know he used to use psychology on me sometime. I'd come up here and take the offering sometime and make some announcements. And I'd come back down right where he sat. Right before he was going to come up here. And he'd call me over and he'd say, "Joel, that's the best offering I've ever heard taken here at Lakewood." He'd say, "You're such a natural." He'd go on and on right there. And I'd always whisper back to him, I'd say, "Daddy, you're a minister. You shouldn't lie." (Laughter)

But you know what? I didn't have any desire. That's not what God wanted me to do at that time in my life. And you know, my point is that it would have been a good thing for me to come out here and speak the last four or five years. It would have been done in the name of God. There surely wouldn't have been anything wrong with it. But you know what friends? It wasn't what God wanted me to do at that time in my life.

And just as it is vitally important to stay on the perfect path for our lives, it is also equally important to stay on God's timetable. Because we're going to all have

opportunities that come across your path sooner or later. Sometimes they're going to look perfect; they're going to look outstanding. You're going to think this is the way for me to go. But you know what? If you seek God and if you pray, sometimes you may not get any release inside. Every time in the natural, it may look perfect and you think, "Why can't I get over this? Why am I uncomfortable? Why do I have this uneasiness?" Do you know what it is friends? It's God telling you to let it go. Now is not the time.

See there's a due season with God. And every opportunity that comes across our path, we ought to evaluate. The first thing we ought to do is get quiet before the Lord and we ought to ask this question, "God, is this opportunity Your perfect will for my life? Or is this simply another distraction to get me off course and to waste valuable years of my life?"

We ought to evaluate every opportunity. And you've got to remember, when you give something up, when you let an opportunity go by, don't think for a minute that God doesn't have something better coming around the corner. If you will just be patient and stay in His perfect will. (Applause)

When my dad passed away in January, God dropped that desire for me to get up here and speak. You don't know how unusual that is for me. Because you know it's much easier, I'm much more comfortable staying behind the scenes. But you know what? I've decided that I want to go past, and I want you too, past complacent Christianity and make a difference with our lives. See, I've discovered that whether times are good or whether times are bad, whether the road is difficult, or whether the road is easy; when you're in the center of God's will, you're going to feel this overwhelming sense of peace, overwhelming joy that the world cannot give.

And I just want to challenge each and every one of you today. Some of you may say, "Joel, you know, I know I'm not on God's perfect plan for my life. I'm not on that best path. I know I've veered off to the right and off to the left. I know I'm hindering God's blessings from coming on my life." Well, I just want to challenge you today to take care of it. You can get in the center of His perfect will. You don't have to tell me what you've done. Just make up your mind that you're going to take care of it today.

See don't be, friends, one of those Christians that they're always going off to the left and off to the right; being deceived here; being deceived there; wasting valuable time from your life. No, be strong. Be stable. You know, seek God's will. You know, keep your mind stayed on Him. We ought to all make up our mind to run our race with extreme focus. You know, like the bible says, "Set your face as a flint" toward that goal. And I believe we'll be able to say like the apostle Paul, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course," not somebody else's. "I finished my course and I have kept the faith."

Let's lift our hands and praise God for His Word today. Father, I thank You and praise You. We will not be deceived. We will not get off course. Father, we will stay in Your best path. For Father, that's when we know that Your blessings will overtake us. We won't be able to outrun them, Father. Father, I thank You for dealing with everyone here; staying on Your best path. Amen.

I believe that's helped you today.

If you'll bow your heads in prayer, please. I want to just take one moment to talk to those that are watching by television. Some of you say, "Joel, you know, you hit the nail right on the head today. I know I'm not in God's best path. I've never even given my life to Jesus." Well, friend, I want to give you that opportunity right now to do that. All you've got to do is pray a simple prayer and mean it from the bottom of your heart. The bible says that, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So just pray this prayer. Say, Jesus, come into my heart. I want You to be my Lord and Savior. I repent of my sins. I want to live for You all the days of my life.

Listen, friend, if you prayed that simple prayer and meant it from the bottom of your heart, I believe you are changed. Now there's something you need to do. You need to get in a good church and let them teach you about the things of God. There are many good churches in town. Many good churches across this nation. We would love to have you come out here to Lakewood if you can. We'd give you a personal warm invitation. But if you can't, go to a good church in your neighborhood. And until we see you again this time next week, we love you and we hope you'll join us again. God bless you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 10"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_10, 7/25/99

DODIE: We greet you today in the name of the Lord Jesus. We're so glad that you've turned your television on. We believe it will be a blessing to you. I want to share this scripture with you. It's in Psalm 67 in the Living Bible. "Oh God, in mercy bless us. Let your face beam with joy as you look down on us." Isn't that good? Don't you want God's face to beam with joy as He looks on us? And not be sad for something we're doing that's not right. If we'll be led of God in our hearts, do what we know is right, then His face will shine with joy on us. And that's what we always want to do. And all the people said Amen. (Amen.) (Applause)

JOEL: We're so glad to have everybody here today. As I tell you each week, I'm honored. I feel humbled to be up here in front of you. But I just count it a great privilege and an honor. And just glad to see all your smiling faces.

You know kids say some of the funniest things. Don't they? I've got some little excerpts from some letters that kids have written to their pastors. I just want to read you two or three of them. They're so funny. They're from kids that are maybe eight or nine years old. Listen to this. "Dear Pastor, I know God loves everybody, but He's never met my sister." (Laughter) "Dear Pastor, my mother is very religious. She goes to play bingo at church every week." (Laughter) "Dear Pastor, I think a lot more people would come to your church if you moved it to Disneyland." (Laughter) "Dear Pastor, I'd like to go to heaven some day because I know my brother won't be there." (Laughter) "Dear Pastor, please say a prayer for our little league team. We either need your help or a new preacher." (Laughter) I'm sorry. "A new pitcher." (Laughter) I'm getting as bad as my mom, getting up here making mistakes. (Laughter) Last one. "Dear Pastor, I liked your sermon on Sunday, especially when it was finished." (Laughter) That's my favorite one.

But listen, we're so glad to have all y'all here. The Bible says in Hebrews, God's a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him. And I want you to be encouraged that God sees you come to church and He's going to reward you for being here. So we're so glad to have you here.

Let's hold up our Bibles and study God's word together. Let's say it like you mean it. Don't ever get tired of it.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) God bless you all.

SERMON: Please open your Bibles to the book of Malachi, chapter 3. We've been talking for the last few months on "Winning the Battle of the Mind" and how important it is for each of us to guard our own thought life and to control what comes into our mind. You know the word "guard" means to protect from danger, to take precaution, to keep watch.

Now Victoria and I we like to take our kids swimming. You all have met my family. Little Jonathan, he's four years old; and our little daughter, Alexandra; she's only eight months old. But quite often, we'll put her in a little baby float and she'll get in that pool with me. But you're talking about guarding and protecting her from danger; I don't take my eyes off of her, as you might imagine. I don't let my hands, you know, release that float not one time. I'm extremely cautious. I'm extremely diligent when it comes to watching after her because I know there's danger there. She could easily drown, you know. She's just a little baby. She can't swim. And really protecting her from danger is a number one priority in my life. Why is that? Because she's important to me. That's my daughter. That's my flesh and blood. I love her more than the whole world. I realize I'm responsible for her. So I exercise extreme caution and extreme diligence when it comes to watching over her because she's important to me.

Well, my challenge to all of us today is we ought to exercise that same caution, that same diligence when it comes to the area of guarding our thought life. You see, everything that you are, everything that you say, every word that you speak, every action that you take, it's got to first come through your mind. Now you and only you control this ever-important doorway to your mind. You choose what you want to think about. You choose what you want to watch. You choose what you want to listen to. You choose what you want to dwell upon. And you know God didn't make any of us robots. We all have our own will. We're all creatures of choice. God gave you the power to make decisions. And I'll say this in the kindest way possible. I don't want it to sound non-caring, but don't blame anybody else for the situation that you're in today. One of the first things we've got to do is take responsibility for our own lives. And it's up to each and every one of us to learn how to guard and control our thought life.

And you know I meet people all the time and they say, "Joel, I'm a good religious person. I go to church regularly. I try to pray every day. But what do you mean? You mean there's something else that I have to do?" Yes, friends, we are in a spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6 talks about that. And you've got to stand guard and be sober every day of your life. And you've got to especially stand guard and control your thought life. See, not understanding that you're in a battle; not realizing how the enemy operates, that gives him a tremendous advantage and it allows him to keep you from reaching the potential that God has planned for each of us.

If we ever knew what God really wanted to do with our lives. See, God says, "My plans for you are good and not evil." And we know the scripture in John 10:10 where Jesus said, "It's the enemy that comes to steal, to kill, and destroy." Jesus said, "I've come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."

So, if we're not experiencing that abundant life, then we ought to check up on ourselves. We ought to find out what's hindering God's power from flowing in my life. What's hindering God's blessings from coming into my life? See, most of the people I deal with that are facing problems, I discovered most of the time the root cause of

their problems is that their thinking is so way out of balance. Their thinking is so contrary to God's Word. You see, you cannot think thoughts of lust 24 hours a day and not expect to have a problem. You can't let your mind be worried and full of anxiety and full of fear and not expect to live a negative, defeated, miserable Christian life. You can't harbor feelings of bitterness and unforgiveness and all kinds of hatred and anger and then turn around on the other hand and think that you're going to live this life of overcoming joy and a victorious Christian life. It doesn't work that way, friends. You become what you think. And if we don't actively, each of us actively and effectively stand guard over our own thought life and control our thought life, then we will allow the enemy to control and manipulate our lives simply by effecting the way we think. And you know friends, I don't want to get you discouraged because this is not hard to do. Every one of you, I promise you, every one of you have the power and the ability to do it. It just takes a little determination; it takes a little will power. You know you've got to spend a little time and energy. It takes a little effort to learn God's Word and do what you're doing today. Every one of you took the first step, you know, learning God's Word. And you've got to understand how to resist the enemy in the name of Jesus. It's not hard. It just takes some time and effort. And I want you to see today the importance of doing it.

See, the same people that tell me, "Joel, you know, it's just too difficult for me. I can't do that. I'm not a religious person. I don't have time to go to church. I'm raising a family. And my career keeps me on the road. And I don't have time to read my Bible and pray." Friends, those same people, and I'm saying it with a smile on my face, those same people are the ones that get up two or three times a month at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and go off and take a hunting or fishing trip. And there's nothing wrong with that. I'm not preaching against that. I'm just saying why isn't that difficult? Because it's important to them. They've made it a priority in their lives.

And see all of us have known people. They've bought a new car. See if you can understand this example. That car is important to them. It cost them a lot of money. They will go through great inconveniences just simply to protect that car. I used to be the same way. See, I've driven up here to Lakewood some Sunday mornings before the crowds got here and I've looked out and seen acres and acres of an empty parking lot. Many, many hundreds of empty parking spaces. But over in the furthest, most remote, most secluded area of the parking lot, there is this car strategically parked so that none of us might dare even breathe on it. (Laughter) You know what I mean? And what I want you to see is there's nothing wrong with that. They're protecting that car. It's important to them. But they don't mind suffering the inconvenience of walking a half a mile to the sanctuary in this heat and humidity. You know, by the time they get here they're usually wringing wet. You know what I mean? You can smell them coming. (Laughter)

But my point is that when something is important to you, you don't mind suffering the inconveniences. I'm not making fun of somebody that does that. I used to do the same thing. That car is valuable to them. They made it a priority in their lives. And every one of you today, you prioritize things in your life. When something's valuable to you, you don't mind spending a little extra effort on it. When something's important to you, you don't mind spending a little extra time and effort and energy on it. Well, what I want to challenge you with is to make guarding and controlling your thought life, that is what you watch, what you listen to, who you listen to, make

that a top priority in your life. How many of you are following me today? You all sure are quiet.

Listen, I'll tell you a funny story about my dad. Talking about protecting your cars. Maybe this will get you all livened up a little. No, my dad, I like to talk about him. My dad used come over to our house you know several times a week about dinnertime--since my mom didn't cook too often. But he'd come over and he'd like to go out to eat with us. And we'd go out to eat. And this one particular day we went to this restaurant. And I'll never forget it because when I park my car, I like to park in wide parking spot. I don't like people to ding my car up. I like to take care of it. You're probably the same way. So I'm real good about if there's not a parking spot that's wide, I'll go park way, way out like that guy did. But my dad, that particular day I was driving his car so I didn't mind quite as much. (Laughter) That's not true. But my dad was with me and I was driving and the only place in this restaurant was this spot that was kind of tight. And I thought, well, you know, I didn't want to make my dad walk. So we parked there. And I meant to tell my dad to be careful when he opened up his door. But he didn't. Daddy was a man of action. He quickly got out of that car and I heard a "kaboom". The first thing I thought is "thank God this isn't my car." The second thing I thought is "I hope nobody saw that." And much to my disappointment, I looked over there and there was a lady sitting in the driver's side of that car. And I was so disappointed because I thought, you know, the restaurant was full of windows and I thought, "Oh man, everybody's going to see this. There's going to be this big scene." So daddy gets out of his car. He doesn't even know what he's done. And this lady now begins to get out of her car. And I just assumed she's going to look at her door. But daddy got kind of excited because he thought the lady was getting out because she recognized him and she wanted to talk to him. (Laughter) So this lady gets out of her car. I'll never forget this in all of my life. And daddy says, "Hi, I'm Pastor Osteen. God bless you. Give me a great big hug, sister." (Laughter) And by this time, I'm going off to the front of the restaurant. And I'll never forget the things he could get away with. But he just talked to her a little while. And he said, "Well, God bless you, I need to get in there and eat with my son. So nice of you to get out of your car. I hope you watch me on television next week." (Laughter) Daddy had a way of getting out of everything. But I don't even think he realized he did that.

But my mom and I were talking the other day about how daddy's driving the last two or three months of his life had gone really down hill. And to tell you the truth, my dad was never a real good driver. But my mom talked about it, she said, "Joel, daddy used to get honked at two or three times every time he went out to drive." And it reminded me one time we were with daddy and he kind of changed lanes rather quickly and some guy honked at him. But you got to know my dad. He believed the best in everybody. He didn't think he had an enemy in the world. So that guy honked and he turned around and smiled real big and waved and said, "God bless you." I'll never forget. He looked at me and had this real satisfied grin on his face. He said, "Joel, I think they go to Lakewood." (Laughter) I told my dad, I said, "Daddy, I can read their lips. If they go to Lakewood, they're going to have to be down front Sunday morning repenting." (Laughter)

Daddy was a lot of fun to have around. He kept it exciting.

But what I'm challenging you with today is to guard and control your thought life. Nobody can do it for you. You're the ones that choose what you want to watch.

You're the ones that choose what you want to listen to. Are our thoughts important? Listen to what Malachi 3:16 says. Read it with me if you would. I'm reading out of the Amplified. So just follow along. The Bible says, "Then those who feared the Lord talked often one to another and the Lord listened and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before him of those who reverently and worshipfully feared the Lord and thought upon his name."

Do you realize this is saying that there's a book being written in heaven that's recording every time you not only talk about the Lord, it records every time you so much as even think upon His name. Do you see how your thoughts are so important? In other words, as you meditate on God's Word, you think about the goodness of God, the Bible says here that God's making an eternal record of that; as you think about how good God's been to you. I think about in my life, you know, I reflect back a lot of times, I'm sure you do too, and you think about how God saved you. He's rescued you from trouble so many times. I think about how God's poured out His favor. And you know He just blessed me abundantly in my life. And the Bible says every time we so much as think about that, God's making that record. I think about when God's made a way when it didn't look like there'd be any way in my life. When He's lifted me up when I was fallen. And as I think on those things, the Bible indicates here that God has an angel that is eternally recording every time. Like I said, not only as you say things about God but every time you even think on the name of the Lord. Do you realize today folks, God is making an eternal record of you being here studying His Word? And I know you're like me. You want that book to be full to overflowing on your behalf of the times you thought on the name of God.

The King James Version says that "This book of remembrance is before him." It's not off in a back storeroom in heaven. It's not even in the same room of God up on a bookshelf. No, the Bible says it's constantly before Him wide open as a constant reminder to those who are thinking upon the name of the Lord.

How many of you have been doing your part? Thinking on the things of God. See it is so important. And what a comfort it is for us all to know that when we go through the battles of life and we go through the struggles of life and sometimes life doesn't go our way, isn't it great to know that God never forgets about us? He remembers every time you've prayed to Him. He's got an eternal record every time you've worshipped Him. He knows every time you've even come to church and maybe you didn't even feel like it. God knows the time that you just reached over there and gave a brother a hug in His name. God remembers every single time. Every time you so much as even think upon the name of the Lord.

And I know, you know, I want God to be so familiar with me that when I have a need in my life or I need a touch from God that I'd go to Him and I'd ask for His help. And He'd say, "You know that's Joel that's calling out to me. I am so familiar with him. He keeps that angel constantly busy writing down things in that book of remembrance." Man, I just want him to be—you know, I want my life to overflow with the goodness and the thankfulness to God. I want Him to be so familiar with me.

And I think about, you use your imagination. I just can imagine that God's sitting up on the throne and we're going to use William as an example. He's right here. William's been with us for 20 years, the head of our Prayer Partners right here. But anyway I can imagine God up here on the throne. And He's looking at that angel that's keeping this record in the Book of Remembrance. And He asks him. He says,

"Angel, who are you writing about?" And that angel says, "God, I'm writing about William. He's down there in Lakewood Church right now. They're studying your word." And you know God smiles and says, "Yeah, that's great." And God decides to get up and take a stroll around heaven. And a couple of hours later He comes back and He asks that angel again. He says "Angel, who are you writing about now?" That angel says, "Well, God I'm still writing about William. Now he's at lunch. He's talking about Your things. He's discussing what he learned in church today with his other brothers and sisters. So I'm making an eternal record of it God." God smiles. He's happy. A few hours later, God comes back by and says, "Well, who are you writing about now angel?" The angel answers the same thing. "I'm still writing about William. Now he's down there at Lakewood. He's baptizing people in your name. He's about to go to church tonight. Now I'm going to have to keep my pen ready to make that record." And see, I can imagine it even goes into the next day. And the next morning rolls around and God asks the same question. And He says, "Who are you writing about now, angel? You know, who are you writing about?" And that angel simply says, "I'm still writing about William. Now he's up this morning. He's got his coffee and donuts. He's reading Your word." I'm sure he eats coffee and donuts. But my point is I want you to get the feeling what must be happening up there. The angel says, "I'm still writing about William." See, and eight or nine hours may go by and God comes back. He says, "Angel, don't even tell me. Let me guess. You're still writing about William." You know what? That angel says, "Yeah, God, all day long, William has been meditating on Your word. He's kept his mind stayed on You. Even when he gets in his car, he turns on music that exalts and edifies and uplifts You. God, he's constantly thinking about You."

Now, think about, you know, a couple of days may go by and William's got a need in his life. And William knows that Hebrews 4:16 says to "let us go boldly to the throne of grace so that we may obtain mercy to find grace to help in time of need." See, William doesn't hang his head down and say, "Oh God, I've been thinking about You. I went to church Sunday. I thought 'Surely I wouldn't have anymore problems.' I thought, 'Surely, I wouldn't have anymore difficulties.'" No, William knows the Word of God. He boldly, unashamedly, without fear, without insecurity, without any kind of inferiority, he goes right into the throne room of grace, and he says, "God my loving heavenly Father, I have a need in my life. I need Your touch. I need Your supernatural power. I need Your wisdom, Your healing, whatever the need is. God, I come to you in faith. Will You answer my prayer?" And I think about God. God says, "Is that the same William that has been constantly thinking about me these last few days?" God says, "William, I am so pleased with you. I'll give you anything that you need. I'll give you the answer to your prayer gladly, willingly, freely." See how important our thoughts are folks. (Applause)

See the Bible says that, "God who spared not his own son would freely give us all things." But folks our thoughts are important. And this does not happen automatically. You have to make the choice. See, we live in a negative society. Everyday you are being bombarded with hundreds of thoughts and images that are ungodly. As long as you're on planet earth, You're going to have to deal with this. You're in a spiritual warfare. And some things we can't control.

But I want to talk a little bit for the rest of today on the things that we can control. I think we would be surprised and amazed at how many times we give the enemy an advantage by not being careful in these areas that we can control. I'm convinced that we go through unnecessary trials and temptations and hardships simply because

we do not exercise a godly restraint when it comes to the things that we choose to listen to and the things we choose to watch, the things we choose to dwell upon. You see I'm convinced that we actually make the battle more difficult because we're not selective and cautious in these areas. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies.

You know I was reading a really fascinating article this week. And it's talking about the mind and the memory system that we have. And it's really intriguing to me because the mind is so fascinating. It's so intricately made. Anyway, these experts had studied our memory system. And they have found that every single event that has happened in your life, whether large or small has been indefinitely recorded into your memory. And if you knew how to properly exercise it, it could be recalled. It almost sounds unbelievable. It's hard to fathom. In other words, every single thing that you take into your memory, every single event is being stored in this tremendous memory system God's given us.

And you know, I was thinking about my little boy Jonathan. He's four years old now. But when he was two years old, we went to California. And we were on this beach and we were building some sandcastles. And during that time, a couple young boys that were about 8 or 9 years old, they came up and they began to help us build these sandcastles for may 30 or 45 minutes. Nothing to it, it was just one event of millions that have occurred in his little life. Well, two years and two months later, after that event. As far as I know, we've never talked about that event before. Two years, two months later, we go back to that same beach. And the first thing Jonathan asked me, he says, I wonder if Sean and Trey are going to be there. He remembered their names. And it really blew me away. I'm not bragging on him. I'm saying what a tremendous memory God has given all of us if we only knew how to exercise it. But really my point is that everything you're putting in, you know where I'm going don't you? Everything you're putting is being indefinitely recorded in this fantastic memory. It's like a huge vault.

So friends, knowing this and knowing the fact that God is recording our every positive thought toward Him, don't you think it becomes even more critical about what we allow into our minds. I know some of you say, "Joel, this is getting kind of extreme. Do you mean that I should scrutinize everything I watch and everything I listen to?" I would, friends. It's being indefinitely recorded. Why make the battle harder than it has to be? Why make temptation more difficult than it has to be to resist? Why give the enemy a foothold?

And see I know some people and I know their attitudes. And they say, "Joel, I'm grounded in the Word of God. I know who I am in Christ. I know how to resist the enemy. I can watch anything I want to. I can listen to anything I want to. It's not going to effect me." But friends, with all due respect, I disagree with you. Because advertisers spend billions and billions of dollars to effect our behavior and to effect the way we think. If it didn't work, I guarantee you they wouldn't spend the money. But I'll guarantee it will effect you eventually. See, the big controversy nowadays is to whether the increased violence on television over the last 20 or 30 years has escalated the violence in our society. Well, who are we trying to kid? You cannot continue to fill people's minds with trash and not expect them to eventually try to emulate it and copy what they've seen. (Applause)

Let me read you a passage of scripture out of the Living Bible. Let me just read it to you. Mark 7:14 in the Living Bible. Jesus is talking to the people and He said, "Listen,

try to understand this. Your souls aren't harmed by what you eat, but by what you think and by what you say." In verse 20, he added, "It is the thought life that pollutes you. For out of men's hearts comes evil thoughts of lust or theft, murder, adultery, and all other folly. All these vile things pollute you and make you unfit for God."

Jesus is saying if you keep your mind filled with all this junk, eventually, your thought life is going to become so polluted that you're going to be unfit for the things of God. And I know some of you are thinking, "Oh, Joel, you're going to try to tell me what I can watch and what I can't watch." No friends, God gave you the power to choose. I'm going to let you make that choice. All I'm going to challenge you with is to be extremely cautious and selective in what and who you choose to listen to and what you choose to watch.

You see, your mind is not a great big garbage can just to fill with all kinds of junk. Everything you put in whether good or bad is being indefinitely recorded. And I know some of you this could sound like "Joel, you don't even want us to be entertained." No, I'm for you being entertained. I like to be entertained. Believe it or not, this is may amaze you, but I don't spend 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, studying about what I'm going to say to you up here each week. I know some of you are thinking, "Yeah, it doesn't seem like you studied 5 minutes this week." (Laughter) You got to cast that thought down. (Laughter)

But nowadays there's a fine line between being entertained and being filled with trash. Now, I don't want to step on anybody's toes here. But you know some of you say, "Joel, I love to watch that wrestling on Monday nights. Man, it's so entertaining." Yeah, but you know what? It's filling your mind with trash. You watch that stuff long enough and your thought life's going to be polluted with thoughts of lust, adultery, hatred, and violence. There's no need putting that junk into your thinking. You say, "Joel, you should have seen Jerry Springer this week. You wouldn't believe what was on that." Yeah, you all know where I'm coming from. Yeah, I wouldn't believe it. But I guarantee if you watch long enough, your mind is going to be in the gutter. Satan knows if he can keep your thought life polluted, he will keep you in defeat. You can't continue to put trash in and not expect one day to get trash out.

You know really, America's entertainment industry as a whole, now I'm talking general, as a whole it has sunk to an all time low. I mean when you think about letting people — (Applause) When you think about it, you can always get an audience letting people air out their dirty laundry on television. But it doesn't mean it's right for you to watch and it doesn't mean it's right for me to watch. That's why God invented the remote control. One click and you can turn it off.

You know, if you don't do this, if you continue to watch this and fill your mind with junk, it's going to effect you. It can even effect you subconsciously. You may not even realize it. But listen to this carefully, your actions or your reactions in certain situations can be influenced by something that is deeply rooted in your memory system.

And listen, much of what Hollywood produces has little or no moral value. I don't think any of you would argue with me. But if you watch long enough, your thought life is going to be so polluted, it's going to get so muddied, it's going to be so unclear

that you're going to think it's okay to sleep with anybody. It's okay to cheat. It's okay to lie. It's okay to steal just as long as it gets you further. But friends, that's not what God's word says, not at all. Don't get me wrong. I'm not talking about all movies are bad and all TV is bad. I'm not saying that at all. Some of them are great and they have inspirational, moral, challenging values. I'm not saying that at all. I'm just challenging each and every one of you today to be very selective and cautious about what you put into this tremendous memory system God has given each of us. You've got to guard and control your own thought life. Nobody else can do it.

And we talked about last week, don't let the enemy get you off God's best path. It's usually not the big things that get you off course. It's the small things. But over time they add up. Romans 8:6 says "to be carnally minded is death; to be spiritually minded is life." And every one of us ought to have a sincere desire to purify ourselves and to serve God wholeheartedly in every area of our lives and especially in the area of our thought lives. Ephesians 4:23 in the Living Bible says that, "your attitudes and thoughts should be constantly changing for the better." And the Bible goes on to say in verse 30, "Don't cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live."

So my challenge to all of you today is to make controlling your thought life, what you put in, a number one priority in you life. Your mind is not a great big garbage can to fill with all kinds of junk. Don't let your mind become polluted so that you can't be used for the kingdom of God. And remember that God is recording every time you so much as even think upon His name. Let's all do our part and we can win the battle of the mind. (Applause)

Well, if you'd bow your heads in prayer, please. I'd like to talk to those who are viewing by television. I'd like to just give you an opportunity. If you've never made Jesus the Lord of your life, well, this is the time to do it. It doesn't have to be difficult. The Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." So, I'm going to invite you to just pray this simple prayer with me today and mean it from the bottom of your heart. Say, oh God, come into my heart. Save me Jesus. Be my Lord, be my Savior. I repent of my sins. And I want to serve You all the days of my life.

Friends, I believe if you prayed that simple prayer and you meant it, you ought to get in a good church and let them disciple you and learn about the things of God. And we're so glad you've tuned in with us today. And if you get a chance, come out here and be with us in person. We'd love to have you. If not, go to a good church in your area. Until this time, may God bless you.

"WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE MIND, PART 11"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_BOTM_11, 8/1/99
(Your Imagination)**

DODIE: We are so glad that you joined us by television today. And we think you're going to be blessed. And I want to read a scripture to you in Proverbs 11:21. And this kind of reminds me of back in 1981 when I was fighting so hard to live with being diagnosed with metastatic cancer of the liver. And I'd go to church every Sunday morning and sometimes on Wednesday nights. And I'd see people out on the golf course and doing all kind of things. And I thought, "here I am going to church and I'm sick. And these people aren't going to church and they're having a good life." You remember John used to say Scooter was in better health than I was, it seemed like. Well that's kind of the way it seemed. But listen it says, "You can be very sure that the evil man will not go unpunished forever. And you can also be very sure that God will rescue the children of the godly." So you see who God rescued? He rescued me. I could have died from cancer. And I don't know what happened to those people that were out playing golf. But God will always rescue the godly. So just remember that. The evil won't get by with it forever. And all the people said Amen. (Applause)

JOEL: Well it is such a joy to come to Lakewood Church and I'm thrilled every time I get up here. One of my favorite things is to look out and to see all the variety of people. You know different races, different walks of life, and different denominations. I don't know if y'all realize that when Daddy founded the church back in 1959 for a little while it was called Lakewood Baptist Church. But he told the story about the sign they had outside the church. It evidently was in three parts: Lakewood, Baptist and Church. You've heard him tell about how a storm came by one day and it blew the word "Baptist" off. And they took that as a sign from God that it was supposed to be Lakewood Church. And that's what we've got today. (Applause) We've got all kinds of people in here. But somebody sent me a funny email about different denominations. You know everybody believes differently. It doesn't mean they're wrong. There are good people in all denominations. But listen to this.

How many Charismatics does it take to change a light bulb? Only one; their hands are always in the air. (Laughter)

How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? Change? Who said anything about change? (Laughter)

How many Pentecostals does it take to change a light bulb? Ten; one to change the bulb and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness. (Laughter)

How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb? None; they use candles. (Laughter) Okay. I've got a couple more.

How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb? Ten; one to change it and nine to sit around and talk about how good the old one was. (Laughter)

How many United Methodists does it take to change a light bulb? We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the meaning of a light bulb. (Laughter)

How many Church of Christ folks does it take to change a light bulb? None; light bulbs aren't mentioned in the New Testament. Therefore it would be unscriptural. (Laughter) (Applause)

Anyway, let's study our Bibles together. Hold them up. Make the devil mad. Wave them around a little bit. Don't ever get tired of it. Say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) God bless you.

SERMON: Would you please open your bible to 2nd Corinthians, chapter 10. Well, I want to talk to you again today on "Winning the Battle of the Mind." Ephesians 6 clearly tells us that we are in a spiritual warfare and our enemy's main weapon is deception. Jesus calls Satan in John 8:44 the "father of lies and all that is false." We know that Satan's main area to work in is in the area of our minds. That's why I've been challenging all of us for the last several months on how important it is to guard your mind and to make choosing what you watch, choosing what you listen to, choosing what you think about, choosing what you're going to dwell on, make that a top priority in your life. You have to take control of your own thoughtlife. You've got to take that responsibility for yourselves. And like we talked about last week, your mind is not a great big garbage can just to fill with all kinds of junk. Everything that you put in whether good or bad is being permanently stored in this tremendous memory system that God has given each and every one of us. And did you notice in Mark 7 verse 20 in the Living Bible, you ought to read that some time, because Jesus said, "It is the thoughtlife that pollutes you and makes you unfit for the things of God." Isn't that interesting? The thoughtlife makes you unfit for the things of God.

Look at 2nd Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 4, if you would please. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Let's talk about that phrase "casting down imaginations." God has given each and every one of us this tremendous ability to imagine. That is to create real life pictures and real life scenarios in our minds. And many different things can spark or influence your imagination. We talked about before how words create pictures in your mind. If I say "dog" d-o-g. If you think about it, a dog will appear in your imagination. If I say big, red dog; again with every descriptive detail your imagination is changing. If

I say big, red, happy, playful dog, if your imagination is working properly, it's showing you those different dogs in your mind. Words create pictures.

But do you realize that our thoughts do the exact same thing. Thoughts create very descriptive, very detailed pictures in your mind. This can either be good or bad. See, if you're thinking on God's Word and you're meditating on God's Word and you're dwelling on God's Word, your imagination is going to paint pictures of you as a successful, healthy, overcoming Christian person. However, if the enemy deceives you into believing his lies and all you think about are these negative thoughts, before long you're going to start to see yourself in that same negative condition. Have you ever noticed how your thoughts are so intricately tied into your imagination? They work hand in hand. For instance, if you begin to dwell on something, you begin to think about something, do you know what happens? Your imagination kicks in and begins to show you a picture; it creates a picture for you.

Now listen to this and see if you can follow this. If you dwell on that picture in your mind and you watch that drama unfold in your imagination, then your imagination can actually start to create new pictures or new questions back into your mind. They are so closely tied together; they can actually feed off one another.

Well, here's my point. If the enemy gives you a simple lie, a simple negative thought comes to your mind, and you begin to dwell on that. What you're doing is you're allowing your imagination to kick in. And your imagination can actually magnify that simple lie. It can actually make that bigger, it can enlarge it, and it can actually start to generate new erroneous lies. It can make that problem much, much bigger simply because you're not casting down these imaginations.

Well see that's why the Holy Spirit so explicitly here says to cast down imaginations. You know that word "cast" is a strong word. The Holy Spirit didn't say pray about it. That word "cast" is the same word in the Greek that comes when Jesus spoke about casting out demons. The word is "ekbalo" in the Greek. E-K-B-A-L-O. It means to "kick out forcefully". So what the Holy Spirit was saying in effect is that these negative imaginations and if you let your mind run wild, it can be very dangerous; they can harm you. You've got to take care of it immediately. You've got to take care of it forcefully. Cast down imaginations in the name of Jesus immediately.

See, your imagination is so powerful. If we only really understood. Listen to this carefully. Once you begin to see yourself doing something, whether good or bad, friends, you're well on your way to accomplishing that. You're well on your way to accomplishing that. And if I take it in the negative sense, if you begin to see your business in bankruptcy; if you begin to see yourself having an affair with that other person at work; if you begin to see your child only on drugs all of his life; if you begin to see yourself as a failure; friends you're headed for trouble.

See, in the book of Genesis chapter 6, there's an interesting scripture there. It's right before God was going to destroy the earth with the flood and the Bible says that, "every imagination and every thought of mankind was only evil continually." There was a time when people's imaginations were only filled with evil. And it's so interesting a little later on in that chapter, it says an interesting verse, it says that "the whole earth was filled with violence." What had happened? The people had become what they'd imagined. You cannot let your imagination run wild. Your imagination will make you do some crazy things.

Somebody sent me this e-mail and it's funny. Talking about your imagination running wild. Listen to this.

"Linda Barnett was 23-years old and visiting her in-laws. While there she went to a nearby supermarket to pick up some groceries. Several people noticed her sitting in her car with the windows rolled up and her eyes closed with both hands behind the back of her head. One customer who had been in the store for a while became concerned and walked over to the car. He noticed that Linda's eyes were now open and she looked very strange. He asked her if she was okay. And Linda replied that she had been shot in the back of her head and had been holding her brains in for over an hour. The man called the paramedics who broke into the car because the doors were locked and Linda refused to remove her hands from her head. When they finally got in, they found that Linda had a wad of bread dough on the back of her head. A Pillsbury biscuit canister had exploded from the heat, making a loud noise that sounded like a gunshot, and the wad of dough shot out and hit her on the back of her head." (Laughter) Can you imagine what her imagination was telling her? "When she reached back to find out what it was, she felt the dough and thought for sure it was her brains. (Laughter) She initially passed out but quickly recovered and tried to hold her brains in for over an hour until somebody noticed and came to her aid."

And this says--I'm going to read it but I'm not saying it. It says: "And yes, Linda is blonde." (Laughter) I didn't say it. I read that. I'm married to a beautiful smart blonde.

But we're talking about guarding your mind, controlling your thoughtlife. Not letting your imagination run wild. You see, I'll give you another example. You can drive out of here today fired up about the things of God. You think, "Man, that was a great service. I enjoyed the praise and worship. I enjoyed the prayer time. That was a good message." And you go out of here driving, singing, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." And you get up on the freeway and five or ten minutes later you're just minding your own business and you come across this billboard with the most beautiful woman in the world you've ever laid your eyes upon. She is lying there so seductively dressed in this red velvet dress. So elegantly caressing this bottle of wine and she's got these beautiful, sultry sleepy eyes. And the caption reads, "Come on baby, make my day." (Laughter) Did I make that dramatic enough? But listen, you've got a choice. Are you going to remember that you were in church five minutes before? Are you going to choose to dwell on that image? Are you going to choose to allow your imagination to run wild and start to expand that situation and bring new thoughts back to your mind? Are you going to choose to cast down that thought immediately and replace it with the Word of God? Are you going to choose to keep your mind stayed on things that are wholesome, pure, honest, and whole like Philippians 4:8 tells us to do? Or are you going to dwell on that image and allow your thoughtlife to become polluted?

See, these are simple, simple choices that we all make every day of our lives. But they are very critical choices. You know we're in a spiritual warfare. The enemy is going to try to get you somehow. And if you continue to dwell on that image, do you know what you're doing? You're allowing your imagination to kick in. And I guarantee you, your imagination will take off and start running 90 miles per hour. And in this situation, your emotions will start to get involved. And the enemy would love for you to make some kind of terrible misjudgment in this hyped up emotional

state. You see the more you dwell on that, the more you think about it, the more you allow your imagination to run wild, the easier it is for the enemy to get you off course. He says, "Looky here, man; I've found a weakness in this guy. I'll make sure he runs across somebody at work this week."

See the Bible talks about Satan "leading people as an ox going to the slaughter house one step at a time." See, I've told you often, Satan will never tell you the end of the road he wants to take you down. He'll never show you what's there or you'd turn around. But he'll begin to tell you, you know your wife doesn't love you. Your wife doesn't appreciate you. And after all, she's not meeting your needs. God wants you to be happy. So it's okay to play around just every once in a while. And I'm convinced his favorite lie is "It won't hurt just this one time." See, that's a favorite lie of the enemy.

But listen to what the Bible says concerning this situation in Proverbs 7:24. Let me read it to you out of the Living Bible. "Listen to me young men, not only listen, but obey. Don't let your desires get out of hand. Don't let yourself even think about her." There's power in our thoughts, power in our imagination. "Don't go near her; stay away from where she walks, lest she tempt you and seduce you. For she has been the ruin of multitudes; a vast host of men have been her victims. If you want to find the road to hell, look for her house."

See, those are strong words aren't they? But you know friends the temptation to compromise and to get off track morally is one of the most common mistakes that I've seen good Christian people make. Whole families are destroyed simply because people don't guard their mind. They don't guard their thoughtlife. They don't cast down imaginations immediately. And they allow some, you know, sweet-talking individual to come in there and talk them into believing that there's a better life somewhere else. And friends that all a lie from the enemy.

Now, I know some of you are saying, "Joel, did you say 'good Christian people?'" Yes, friends, good Christian people get off track. The enemy works overtime in this area. The enemy doesn't want any of you here to have a successful marriage. He doesn't want you to have a lengthy marriage whatsoever. Young people and single people, he doesn't want you to remain faithful and true in the area of your morals. And I know some of you here today say "Joel, I'm not even tempted with this type of temptation. I'm not even susceptible to this type of problem. You know, I read my bible and pray. And I meditate on God's Word." Well, friends, that's great. I believe you're on the right course. But I still want to challenge each and every one of us that even when we feel like we know it all or we feel the most invincible, that's the time that we all need to especially stand guard.

Listen to what the bible says in 1st Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 12. "Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." If you think you stand. Listen to Galatians 6:1. "Brothers, if a Christian is overcome by sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back on the right path remembering that next time it may be one of you that have fallen."

See, friends, I'm not trying to convince you or scare you or confess to you that you're going to fall and get off track, but rather to challenge you to stand guard over your life. Don't become lazy in your Christian life. Don't become sort of indifferent and just nonchalantly drift through life and say "Yeah, I'll go to church" or "I can

watch this; I can listen to this, it doesn't really matter to me." Friends, I've seen the best Christians in the world fall aside when they get trapped into that kind of thinking. You've got to be sober every day of your life. You've got to stand cautious at all times. You've got to guard your mind, control your thoughtlife. You've got to cast down these imaginations immediately. Don't let your imagination run wild.

You think it couldn't happen to you, but I think about David. He was surely one of the greatest men in the Bible. I'd certainly think he was the greatest warrior of all time. I mean David when he was a young shepherd boy, a teenager, he was thrust into fame when he went out there and he destroyed Goliath, the champion of the Philistine army. He stood over nine feet tall. And King Saul noticed what happened. And he made David the Commander-in-chief of the Israeli forces. And David led those forces from victory to victory to victory at a young early age. And he became a hero to the Israeli people. Do you think David would have to guard his mind? Do you think he'd have to control his thoughtlife? Do you think he'd have to be careful what he saw? Surely not him, he was God's man for the hour. I mean he was--you know the prophet Samuel had anointed him King. David had killed lions with his bare hands.

But you know what friends? David was human just like you, just like I. David had emotions. He had feelings. He had to guard his thoughtlife. He had to control what he watched just like you and I have to do no matter how spiritual we are.

Because in the book of 2nd Samuel, chapter 11 David was a little over 50 years old, and the bible talks about that David for some reason he asked Joab, one of his army men to lead the forces of Israel to fight against the Ammonites. I don't know; it was unusual. It was very customary for David to lead the forces of Israel but for some reason--the bible doesn't tell us--for some reason this day, David didn't go out on the fight; he didn't go out to the battle. I don't know. Maybe David was, maybe he was tired. Maybe he was sick. Maybe he was lazy. Maybe it was the enemy just trying to convince him to let his guard down and get him off his best path for his life. Because we read a little later about when the troops were out there fighting the Ammonites, the bible says that one evening, David arose from his bed and he went up to the top of the palace, unto the roof of the palace. No doubt he was going to go up there and get some fresh air. Maybe he was just going to gaze on the stars. Maybe he was just going to think about God. But you know what? He got up there and he got a lot more than fresh air this night. You all know the story. He looked over to one of the other rooftops and he saw a lady taking a bath. The Bible says she was a lady of uncommon beauty. Now, I'll pause here to ask all you women kindly to do us men a favor. Don't be taking baths out in public. (Laughter) That gets everybody in trouble. But you know, I can imagine David goes out there and he lifts his hand to the Lord and says "Thank you Lord for leading me up here tonight. Somebody go get me the binoculars quick." (Laughter)

Here's the great Psalmist. Here's the great warrior. The man that God had touched. He was you know certainly spiritual. What's he going to do? Write a song about how he overcame this temptation? Not hardly, friends. David chose to watch. But he had a choice. And every one of you has a choice when temptation comes your way. The bible says that there's not any temptation that comes to any one of us that is so strong that we can't overcome it. God said He would never let us be tempted beyond what we can bear.

See, David had a choice. What did he do? Did he guard his thoughtlife? Did he guard his eyes? Did he turn away? Did he cast down those imaginations? Not hardly. I can imagine David began to watch. And you know what happens. The longer he watched the more his imagination kicks in. And the more he dwells on it, the more he got emotionally involved. And now he's about to make a critical misjudgment simply because he wasn't careful and selective about what he watched. He didn't cast down imaginations. He didn't guard and protect his own thought life.

And you all know the story of what happened. David sent for Bathsheba and he committed adultery with her. And you all have noticed how one sin usually leads to another sin. If you've ever lied—and who here hasn't—but you've got to tell two, three, or four other lies to cover up that one lie. That's the same thing that happened to David. Bathsheba unfortunately got pregnant that night. So David had to have her husband, Uriah, killed so that he could take her as his wife and cover up this terrible misfortune; this terrible tragic mistake.

And you know I go back what all started it. It all started by what he chose to watch. And you're trying to tell me today that it doesn't matter what you watch, what you listen to. It certainly does. Here's a great man in the bible that got led astray. Amen. (Applause)

But the more David watched, the more he got emotionally involved, the more his imagination got going. And before long he couldn't even make a clear decision. And there are some interesting things about this story worth pointing out. A couple of things I want to point out. One is that if David would have been doing what God told him to do, if he'd been out there leading the forces of Israel, I don't think for a minute that he would have fallen into this temptation. He certainly wouldn't have at this time. And you know I've been talking a lot about staying on God's best path for your life. And you know God's got a perfect will for you and He's got a perfect will for me. But I'm convinced that we all go through unnecessary temptation, unnecessary trials, unnecessary hardships simply because we don't stay on God's best path for our lives. That's why I challenge you to get quiet before the Lord. Make sure you're doing what God wants you to do. Not what God wants somebody else to do, not what God wants your neighbor or your family to do. Say, "God what do you want me to do?"

See, I know God's dealing with some of you in here today; some of you that are watching today. There are things holding you back from experiencing God's best. Only you know what they are. And you know you're not pleasing God. You know you're compromising. Well, I challenge you today to get on God's best path. Don't be like an old mule that is so hard headed and so stubborn that you've got to constantly have a bit put in your mouth or either you've got to have somebody prodding you to stay on course. Don't be like that. See, we ought to have a sincere desire to please the Lord from the pureness of our heart.

The Bible talks about you know when you're in His perfect will that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. I'm not saying you're not going to have a problem. I'm not saying you're never going to face temptation. But I am saying that you're going to have supernatural strength; you're going to have supernatural power; you're going to have supernatural ability, peace, endurance, to overcome no matter what you face when you're in the center of God's perfect will.

See, another interesting fact about this scripture, it says, "that when evening was come, David arose from his bed." Don't anybody take this wrong if you work nights. But that indicates that David was sleeping all afternoon. And I don't know, I can't prove this, but I know David was not a lazy person. David was a warrior. I'm sure that was not his routine. But you know I just imagine like I said earlier that the enemy somehow convinced him to let his guard down. He got a little lazy. He gave the enemy a foothold.

See, friends, idleness gives a tremendous advantage to the enemy. One of the most times you have to stand on guard and control your thought life is when you're bored or when you're lazy. And I'm not saying that it's wrong to be lazy sometimes. I'm not saying that. Because sometimes all of us want to just kick back for an afternoon and not deal with anything. We used to call it growing up, we want to "gel out". We don't want to do anything. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. But I am encouraging you not to fall into the trap of every time you walk home from work, you put your belongings down and you go over to that Lazy Boy and collapse into it and put your feet up and grab the remote control and start flipping through the channels nonstop for the next six or eight hours. Friends, don't fall into that trap. You do that and your thought life, I guarantee you, is going to become polluted and there's no telling what your imagination is going to be showing you. I encourage all of you to turn off the TV a little more; you know turn off the computer when you get home, put down the newspaper. You've got enough junk in your mind already. (Applause) See, we've got enough junk in our minds already. I encourage you all to spend some quality time with your family. You know, get up and take them for a walk at night. A little exercise wouldn't hurt any of us, would it? I know some of you say "Joel, my lazy husband wouldn't walk from the front door to the end of the driveway to pick up a hundred dollar bill." But listen friends, your husband probably thinks the same thing about you. One of you needs to make a difference. One of you needs to take the initiative and make a change in your lifestyle, make a change in your family for the better so your thoughtlife doesn't become polluted.

You know, I'll tell you something personal about me. When I get lazy and I feel kind of lethargic and I kind of feel unmotivated. Do you know the first thing I know to do is I get up and go exercise. When you exercise, all these chemicals are released in your body. These endorphins, they stimulate your brain, and man I come out feeling invigorated. And I come out feeling like I got a new attitude. And sometimes we like to make everything so spiritual. Sometimes God is saying to us you know if we get up off our you-know-whats, we'll get out there and feel better. How many of you have ever exercised and you come back and you feel invigorated? How many of you have ever exercised and you come back and you feel sick to your stomach? That happens too.

But listen, I'm challenging you today to be selective in what you watch, what you listen to, and more importantly to cast down imaginations. Don't allow yourself to see yourself, your imagination to show you, in all these compromising, ungodly, negative situations. As long as you start to see yourself you're on that road to accomplishing it. You've got to cast down imaginations in the name of Jesus.

And you know David made a terrible mistake. Let's get back to David. He made a terrible mistake. He committed adultery. He had a man murdered. And I know some of you are in here today and you say, "Joel, I've done some pretty bad things too. I've made some poor choices. I've made some bad decisions. I've hurt a lot of

people." And you think, "Can God really forgive me? I don't know if He can forgive me?" Well, listen friends, I doubt seriously if there is anybody in here that's done anything as bad as David. Can God forgive David? Well God says in the Bible in 1st John 1:9, "If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive you of your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

David simply cried out to God in Psalm 51; you could read it some time. He repented. He said, "God, blot out my transgressions, create a new heart within me; renew a right spirit within me." And you know the goodness of God, we can talk about that for an hour or two. God's got so much mercy. God not only pardoned David's iniquity; He not only completely and totally washed him clean. The bible says that God made David "a man after His own heart". Can you fathom the goodness of God? God forgave a man that made a mistake of that magnitude. And do you realize God wants to do the same thing for you? God wants to receive you back. He totally restored David. And He wants to do the same thing for you.

So I know some of you today are saying, "Joel, I have a heavy heart. Like I said, I've made some bad choices." But you know what friends? God can give each and every one of you a new beginning. The bible says that God's "mercy endures from generation to generation to generation." God's love and mercy for you will never, never run out.

So I just challenge all of you today to be on guard. You know, when I was studying this week, I didn't plan on talking any about staying faithful in the area of your morals. So I just challenge you all to take heed to that. Somebody needed to hear it. I'm sure all of us needed to hear it. So, let's be on guard. Do our part. Be selective. Control your thoughtlife. And if we do our part, I promise you, we'll win the battle of the mind.

?Amen. Let's give the Lord a great big handclap. (Applause)

?I just wanted to give an opportunity to those of you who are viewing by television that don't know the Lord to make Jesus the Lord of your life. You know it doesn't have to be hard. The Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." God can give you that new beginning that I was talking about just a few minutes ago.

?And I just want to ask you to pray this simple prayer. Say Jesus, come into my heart. Be my Lord. Be my Savior. I'll serve you all the days of my life.

?Well friend, I hope you prayed that prayer. And if you meant it from the bottom of your heart, your life will never be the same. I challenge you to get into a good church in your area. If you can, come out here and see us at Lakewood Church. We would love to have you. If not, until this same time next week may God bless you and we love you.

ENLARGE YOUR VISION

"ENLARGE YOUR VISION"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_ELV_001 - 1/02/00
"ENLARGE YOUR VISION"**

OPENING: At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Great it is to dream the dream... Founded by a man who understood the transforming power of love. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern; your life is full of potential; and this moment can determine your destiny. We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!

DODIE: We welcome you to our program on this first service in January in the new Millennium. And we are so glad that you've joined us today. And I want to give you a scripture that will bless you. "Never forget your promises to me your servant." I'm God's servant. You're God's servant. Aren't you glad to be God's servant? "For they are my only hope. They give me strength in all my troubles. How they refresh me and how they revive me." God's Words will give you strength and they will refresh you and they will revive you. So, if you don't read the Word of God, let me suggest that you begin the new year by doing that because it will bless you and help you and revive you. And all the people said? Amen and Amen. (Applause)

JOEL: We do welcome all of you to Lakewood Church. We're so glad to have you here. We love you. We believe in you. We pray for you often. We believe for God's best in your life.

And those of you watching by television, we're so glad you give us the opportunity to come into your home or wherever you're watching each week. We love you. We feel like you're part of our extended family. And if you ever get a chance to come out here and visit us at Lakewood, we'd love to have you. If you don't have a good church home, you ought to get in one. And Lakewood Church is a great place. We've made room for you. Two Sunday morning services, 8:30 and 10:30. Come on out here and be with us whenever you can.

The Bible says, "the Lord is good and his mercy endures forever." Isn't it good to know that God's mercy indeed has endured into this new millennium? Thank God we all survived the Y2K scare. It wasn't as bad as we thought. We did everything we possibly could do around here. We made sure our computers were Y2K ready. And as far as we know, everything has come off without a glitch. (Light's out!) Almost everything! (Laughter/Applause)

See, my dad would have never done that! I'll tell you a funny story I heard. It's a joke. It's not theologically sound, please don't believe this at all. But it's about this couple that was on the way to their wedding ceremony and they were tragically killed in an automobile accident and they went to heaven. They were standing before the Pearly Gates and St. Peter was there. And they were kind of disappointed they never got married. And so, they asked St. Peter, they said, "Peter is there any way we can get married up here in heaven?" Peter said, "I don't know. Nobody's ever asked. Let me go check." And so he went away for the longest time. He was gone for like two months. And they began to wonder if this was really a good idea. They started to think about, "What happens if we don't like each other? Are we stuck forever? You

know, we're in heaven, after all." And about that time, St. Peter came back and he was all bedraggled looking. He was tired and you could tell he was a little irritated. And he said, "Yes, you can get married in heaven." And they said, "Well, that's great, Peter." They said, "But let me ask you a question. What if we don't like each other? Is it possible that we can get a divorce up here, too?" And old Peter turned red with anger. And he threw his clipboard down. And he said, "Listen, man, it took me three months to find a preacher up here. Do you know how long---" (Laughter) Okay, ya'll are doing like the first service. Ya'll are laughing before my punch line. He said, "Do you know how long it's going to take me to find a lawyer?" (Laughter) All right. Hold up your bible. Let's say it stronger than ever this first Sunday of the new millennium.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Ya'll sound great. Please open your bibles to 2nd Chronicles, chapter 16.

What a joy and a privilege it is for me to share with you each week. This is such an exciting time to be alive. And I have such an incredible sense of expectancy in my spirit. I trust that you do too. God has such great things in store for each and every one of you. Don't think any of you are here by accident. You are all here as part of God's divine plan. God has so much confidence in you that He specifically chose you before the foundation of the world to be here at this particular time in history. We are people of purpose, people of destiny. And we have been raised up for such a time as this.

And I prayed, "God, on this first Sunday of the new Millennium, what would You have me share with your people?" And God spoke to me so strongly. He said, "Joel, tell my people to believe me for bigger things and to go beyond their own natural limited thinking." See, God wants you to go beyond your old barriers of the past. And dream big dreams. Reach for new heights. Broaden your horizons. God's power is available to each and every one of you.

And in 2nd Chronicles 16, verse 9, very familiar scripture, the Bible says "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." God is constantly searching for people that will dare step out of their comfort zone and trust Him for bigger things.

We need to believe for a stronger anointing, for more of God's power in our lives so that we can see more miracles and more people brought into the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, All things are possible if you believe. And I'm here today on this first

Sunday of the new year to challenge you to stir up your faith and believe. Stir up the gift of God that is within you.

My prayer is that God will enlarge your vision in this coming year. And friends, we have to go beyond our limited thinking of the past. So many times we get into a routine, and we sink into a rut and we become stagnate. I know, it's happened to me. We pray the same thing year after year. We believe God with the same amount of faith year after year and, unfortunately, we end up at the very same place year after year. But the hour is too late for that kind of living.

And Jesus told Peter--when he was out there fishing on the Sea of Galilee--He told Peter to "launch out into the deep and you will catch a great number of fish." And Peter said, "Jesus, we've been fishing all night. There's not any fish out there. Jesus, I'm an experienced fisherman. That's not the way I do things. I have my own routine. I've been doing it this other way for years and years and years."

But Jesus said, "Peter, if you don't want to believe me, that's fine. You're only hurting yourself. If you want to remain in the same condition and at the same place for the rest of your life, then just continue to be hardheaded and stubborn and nothing will change." But He said, "Peter, if you really want to see what I have in store for you; if you really want to experience my supernatural blessings in abundance. If you really want to see how I desire to bless you, then you're going to have to change that thinking. And you're going to have to get out of that routine and go further than you're used to going and believe me and trust me and launch out into the deep waters." And I can hear Jesus say, "Come on, Peter. I dare you; just do it one time. Let me show you what I can do for you."

And sure enough, you know the story, Peter launched out and just as Jesus promised him, he caught a great number of fish. So much so that his nets began to break. See, God always does things in abundance. But Peter had to take the first step and change his thinking. And friends, you cannot think one thing and believe God for another thing. You cannot think poverty and defeat and misery and failure and expect to believe God with faith in your heart for victory at the same time.

Your believing is always going to follow your thinking. And Jesus said in Matthew 8:13, As you believe so it will be done unto you. And this is why it's so incredibly important to get your thinking in line with God's Word. We have to know in this new year that God can do anything and that He can see you through any situation or any circumstance that you're facing. Nothing is too hard for our God.

And Jesus is saying to every one of you here today, on this first Sunday of the new millennium, "Launch out into the deep. Believe me for bigger things and you're going to see more of My power, more of My miracles, more of My blessings, and more of My favor than you've ever even dreamed of."

But see friends, it all starts with our thinking. Most of the time our own thinking limits us. Our natural mind tries to reason out everything naturally, of course. But God is not a natural God. We must understand He is a supernatural God and He is not limited to these laws of nature that we're so used to. The Bible says that God doesn't think like we think. It says that his thoughts are higher and they are better than our thoughts.

Johnny will you bring me that illustration real quick. And all my volunteers come up if you would. I want to show you this illustration real quick. It will demonstrate just how limited we are in our thinking many times. Thank you guys for being a part of this. The object here...we've got nine dots. And the object is to connect all nine dots using only four straight connected lines. They have to be connected. I'm going to give each of you guys a chance. Let me show you what I mean first. I'll do the first one. You can do four lines but you can't pick your pen up. There's a way to connect all nine dots. Let me give you an example. One, two, three, four. All right, I left one dot out. The idea is to connect them all. Ladies first. Good luck. You can't pick your pen up...two, three, four, five. Well, that's all right, you're still not going to do it. Well, you went one too many. That's okay. One more time. You go next, she cheated.

You can go four. Start at the end, start at the end. One, two, three, four. Okay, Lavelle, you left three, that's pretty good. No, you left two, I'm sorry. Come on, Bob. One, two three, four. All right, good try. Thank ya'll very much. You fell right into my trap. Let me show you how it's done ya'll. It's not difficult. But you know, our thinking is limited.

Here we go, you start right up here. Come right across here. Then we go right there. But guess what? We're not going to stop there. We're going to go beyond the old barriers of the past. We're going to go beyond our old limitations. If I just go four or five inches outside of the box, then I can come down right here and continue on outside of the box and then come on right there and all of them are connected. (Applause)

See, the thing is the box represents the natural. That's where we live. But out here this represents the supernatural. That's where God is. And do you realize friends God can go way out here to get your miracle if He needs to. He's God. He can do anything. Isn't that good? (Applause)

The only thing that stops Him is our lack of faith. And our lack of faith starts right here in our mind. Thank you, Johnny. You know, all throughout life, your natural mind is going to try to reason out everything logically. How are you going to fix each problem? How are you going to fix each situation? And you know, the problem is many times there is no logical solution to the things we face in life. And this just leads to more worry and frustration. And the more you dwell on your circumstances and the more you analyze that situation, the more down and discouraged you're going to become. And friends you cannot believe God with faith in your heart with a negative worried fearful mind. That's why it is so important in this new year to constantly meditate on God's Word so that faith will stay built up in your heart.

Do you remember the story in the book of Luke, chapter 1? The angel came to the Virgin Mary and said, "Mary, behold, you have found favor with God. And you're going to conceive and give birth to a child and they shall call his name Jesus". Do you realize Mary reacted about the same way you and I would have reacted? You can tell by her answer she gave to the angel. She had to fight off doubt. She had to, I believe, change her thinking. She said to the angel, How can this be? In other words she was saying in effect to that angel, How in the world is this going to happen? This sounds impossible. You're telling me that I'm going to have a baby without ever knowing a man. That's never happened before. She said, This is a little too far out for me to believe. She looked at him and said, Tell me angel, how can this be?

And the angel answered back to her and said, "Mary, the Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High God shall overshadow you." And I'm here to tell you just because we've entered into this new millennium doesn't mean God has changed. He is still the same and the Holy Spirit is still alive and active and living on the inside of every one of us and God's power is still available to every one of you to come upon you and overshadow you and give you the miracle that you need.

See, the Bible says in Psalms, the very day we pray, the tide of the battle turns. Things in the spirit world start to take place. God begins to dispatch the angels. The miracle gets set into motion. Just because you don't see anything with your natural physical eyes doesn't mean a thing. There's a whole world out there that we can't see with these natural eyes. Yet it is more real than the world we're living in. You've got to just keep the faith and don't waiver. You've got to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God can do anything. He has rescued you before; He can rescue you again. Nothing too hard for our God. There is a due season with God. In His timing, your answer will come. Until then, you've just got to stand strong and keep the faith and keep a positive attitude and speak forth the promises of God and don't ever give up. And don't ever give in to discouragement.

And I know some of you say, "Joel, but I've been believing God for my husband to come with me to church for many, many years. Joel, he just won't come. He's against the things of God. He makes fun of all this stuff. He's a hopeless case, Joel. How is God ever going to change his cold hard heart of stone? Joel, how could that possibly happen?" Listen, God is saying to you the same thing he said to the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit is going to come upon him and the power of the Most High God is going to overshadow him. And listen friends, when that happens he doesn't have a chance. When God's power hits him he'll run to church. He'll beat you to church. See, the key is just to never, ever lose your hope. Hebrews tells us to "hold fast the profession of our faith". You've got to take a firm grip and never give up. It's not over until we win.

See, and God is saying to all of us today that we've got to enlarge our vision concerning the people that we reach out to. All too often we make the mistake of trying to find the people we think are the most likely candidates to become a Christian. And we look for the people that are kind and honest and respectful and it's easy to share our faith with them. But when we come across those people that are a little bit loud, maybe they're the big party-er at work, maybe they're known for doing drugs and being loose in their morals, maybe they're a little obnoxious and disrespectful, and maybe they curse God's name. You know our natural tendency is to shy away from them. We think, "Man, it will be a cold day in hell before God ever saves you, buddy." But listen, don't be too sure of that. God never, ever rules anybody out. Nobody is ever too low or too far gone for the power of our God to change in a split second. He can change it in a split second.

And we've got to believe God for big things in this year 2000. And most of the people that you encounter that are like that, all they're waiting for is for somebody to tell them that there's a better way. Oh sure they look happy on the outside, but if the truth be known, it's all a façade. Deep down on the inside they're hurting, they're lonely, they're miserable, and they're empty. And maybe there are some of you people in here today that feel that same way. Maybe you feel like you're pretty hopeless. That you've sunk too low that our God can never pick you up. You say, "Joel, you just don't understand my situation. I wasn't raised in church like you

were. You know all those people in your congregation they're there because they've lived good clean moral lives. And you just don't understand the mistakes I've made in the past." First off, friends, we're not here because we're perfect. We're here because we're forgiven. (Applause)

Without the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and without the everlasting mercy of our loving heavenly Father, we wouldn't have a chance. But I know you say, " Oh Joel, but yeah there's nobody's been hooked on heroin like I have. There's nobody that's cheated on their mate as much as me, Joel. Nobody that's cursed God's name as much as me, Joel. Nobody that's been down and lonely and as depressed as I have."

But sure there is. There's people all over this audience that were once just like you. The only difference between us and you now is that we have chosen to make Jesus the Lord of our lives and He has changed us in a split second. And He can do the same thing for you. (Applause) Let me prove it to you.

How many of you here once were on hard drugs? I'm not talking about you smoked pot one time and we have to debate whether or not you inhaled or not. I'm talking about one time you were on cocaine, heroin, LSD, or some other hard drug. Stand up and let us see you. (Applause) Amen. How many of you here were once seriously addicted to alcohol? Stand up. Stand up. Everybody remain standing. How many of you once were in the penitentiary? Stand up, would you. How many of you once were so depressed and discouraged you were thinking about suicide? Stand up, would you? Look at all the people. The Bible says when God forgives you from much, you'll love much.(Applause)

Remain standing just a second. No wonder ya'll are so enthusiastic. No wonder you're so fired up. I mean we've got a reason to shout the praises of God. (Applause)

Let me ask you something, those of you standing. How many of you credit Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone for breaking every bondage and addiction in your life? Amen. (Applause) God bless you and you may be seated.

Jesus said in John 8:36 says, "When the son of God sets you free, you are free indeed". And you know, I'm sure there are some people here today that you're struggling with addictions. And I just want to tell you that what God did for all of them, He wants to do for you. There is no addiction that is too strong for the power of our God to break. I don't care what it is. The Bible says that every thing has to bow to the name of Jesus Christ. You may be addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, money, greed, power. You may be addicted to lying. I'm telling you there's nothing too strong that the power of Jesus Christ can't break in a split second.

Some of you are so low, you're so depressed, you're so hopeless that you've got to look up to see bottom. But, the good news I have to tell you today is that you can never sink too low for our God. You can never be too far gone. There is no case that is too difficult for Him. His desire is to pick you up and to dust you off and put you back on your feet and to give you a new fresh start in life and give you a new beginning. That's what the Gospel is all about. He'll fill your life with purpose. He'll fill your life with meaning. All you've got to do is just call out to Him. Just right where you are. Just say, Jesus, help me.

See, so many people they try to clean their life up first and then they say, "Joel, when I do that I'll come to church, I'm going to give my life to God." Friends, those are good intentions but unfortunately, you cannot do it on your own. You need God's help. And the key is to come to Him just as you are and say, Jesus, I've made a mess out of my life, but I'm going to give You a chance. I want You to come into my life and help me to change. And the Bible says if you do that that the Spirit of the Living God will infuse the life of God into your Spirit man and where you once were dead, you will be made alive to God. The Bible says you will be made a new creature in Christ Jesus. And the Holy Spirit that's on the inside of you that will help you to change.

And see, friends, I'm not talking about turning over a new leaf or making a New Year's resolution. That's not going to do you any good. That's not going to last. I'm not talking about getting religion. I'm talking about knowing a person-Jesus Christ. He's the Savior of the world. And He wants to be your best friend. And He wants to change your life and give you a fresh new start in life. I dare you to just call out to Him.

See, David said in Psalms 40, "God has lifted me out of the horrible pit and he has set my feet upon a rock, steadying my steps and establishing my goings. And he didn't stop there. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." God is so good. We've got to believe Him for big things in the year 2000. (Applause) Some of you I know you need a miracle in your finances. You're living from paycheck to paycheck and it's a real struggle. And I know sometimes you wonder if you're ever going to get ahead; if you're ever going to get out of that mess. And I know some of you tempted to start thinking, you know, maybe God wants me to stay in this condition. After all mama and daddy lived in poverty. And grandmama and granddaddy they were broke all their life. Maybe this is just my lot in life. But friends, don't ever, ever give in to that kind of thinking. Don't ever learn to live with mediocrity. God wants to bless you so that you can be a blessing to others in this world.

And you've got to enlarge your vision today. You've got to see yourself out of debt. You've got to see yourself on top. You know, God makes streets out of gold. It's not going to bankrupt heaven for Him to give you that promotion at work or that new job making a lot more money or to give you an inheritance from a long lost relative that you never even knew you had. Listen, the Bible says "God takes pleasure in the prosperity of his people."

And I know some of you say, Joel, listen, I've gone as far as my career is going to allow me to go. I'm making as much money as I'm going to ever make right now. I've gone as far as my education will possibly let me go. Listen, friends, you are limiting God with that kind of thinking. You're thinking inside the box. Your job is not your source. God is your source. (Applause) One idea from Almighty God can change the course of your life. God can give you a dream that can bring you millions and millions of dollars that you can give into His Kingdom.

And see friends, I'm believing in these coming years we're going to give hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars into our Missions Projects here and all over the world. But you say, Joel, how is that going to happen? You say Joel, how in the world is that going to happen. Let me tell you how. The Spirit of God. God's power is going to overshadow all of you and cause you to be supernaturally blessed so that you can

give into the Kingdom of God. God is searching for people to show Himself strong in their behalf.

And friends, God has put a dream and desire in the heart of every single person here. You must understand God put that there and He wants it to come to pass. But throughout life, the enemy is constantly trying to fight us and discourage us and knock us down and to steal the dream out of our heart. He will tell you nothing good is ever going to happen to you; your dream is never going to come true. But friends, listen, don't ever be influenced by him. Jesus called him a liar and the father of all lies. Just let that bounce off of your back.

Some of you single people you've been believing God to find a mate, a husband or a wife for maybe many, many months; maybe many years. And I know sometimes you get down and lonely and you're tempted to say, you know, "God, how in the world am I ever going to find the right person? There's so many people out there. God, this just seems impossible." But you've got to remember today all things are possible if we will only believe. And the Bible says, it is "through faith and patience that we inherit the promises of God." Sometimes patience is the hard part. Remember you can do it if you can just remember that the answer is on the way. Things are happening in the spirit world. When you prayed, God set the miracle in motion. Just don't give up.

One time in the Old Testament Moses was complaining to God that the children of Israel didn't have any meat to eat while they were out there in the wilderness. And God said, No problem Moses. I'll give you meat for 30 straight days. And Moses was shocked. He said, God, do You realize there are 2 million people out there? If we butchered all of our flocks and all of our herds, we wouldn't even then have enough meat for all these people for 30 straight days. He said, God how in the world is this going to happen? And God spoke back to him sharply. He said, Moses, when did I become weak? Have you forgotten that I'm the one that created the worlds? Have you forgotten I'm the one the that opened up the Red Sea to let all you guys walk through on dry ground? Why are you questioning me, Moses? When did I become weak?

And see friends, God says the same thing to every one of you in your time of need. He says, Have I somehow lost my power and ability to take care of you and to meet your needs? He says, Look at the birds of the air. I take care of every one of them every day. I feed them. I clothe them. They never lack. Yet, they don't even know where their next meal is coming from. And yet I provide for them every single time. Can't I do that much for you? Can't I take care of you and give you the miracle you need? Certainly He can if we only believe.

And see, I challenge you as we enter into this new era, I challenge you to enlarge your vision. Dream bigger dreams. Reach for new heights. Broaden your horizons. Think outside of the box. There is nothing too difficult for our God. If we believe, all things are possible. And we have to go beyond the limited thinking of the past. This is a new day, a time of new beginnings, and God is turning up the intensity in these last days. And He wants to pour out on every one of you His Spirit in greater measure if you will only stir yourself up and believe. The Bible says God is constantly searching for people to show Himself strong in their behalf. I say: God, search no more. Here we are. The people of Lakewood Church. Pour out Your Spirit on us God. We believe You. We trust You. We love you. We're willing. We're open. We're

obedient. God, use us to shake this city and to change this world for Your Glory and for Your Glory alone. Amen and amen. Let's lift our hands and praise Him would you.

"ENLARGE YOUR VISION, PART 2"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON NOTES #SER_ELV_002 - 1/9/00

OPENING: At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. "Great it is to dream the dream..." Founded by a man who understood the transforming power of love. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. (Music) We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!

DODIE: (Applause) Amen. We welcome you today to our television broadcast. We're so glad you tuned us in. Keep that dial right where it is because you're going to be blessed. Let me give you a scripture. Isaiah 50 says "Because the Lord God helps me". Would you say, "God helps me"? (God helps me) "Because he helps me I will not be dismayed." It's awfully easy to get dismayed sometimes. "Therefore I have set my face like a flint to do his will and I know that I will triumph." Now if you have not set your face like a flint to do His will, then you may not be triumphing. But if you'll do it, then God promises us that He will cause us to do valiantly because He will cause us to triumph. And all the people said, "Amen and amen." (Applause)

JOEL: The Bible says, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised." We've already been having church this morning, haven't we? And we're so glad to have all of you here whether you're a visitor or a long-time faithful Lakewood member, we just want to tell you how much we love you and appreciate you and we believe in you, we pray for you often, and we just believe for God's best in all of your lives.

And we always like to give the folks watching by television an opportunity to come out here and see us. We would love to have you. You'll meet some of the friendliest, caring, most godly people in the world right here at Lakewood Church. They're the best people in all of Houston. Some of you watch us but you never come. Why don't you just make up your mind to come join us one day. We'd love to meet you in person. Let's give them a great big hand clap, would you?(Applause)

Hold up your bibles and let's say it like we mean it now. Stronger than ever this year.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen. (Amen.)

SERMON: God bless ya'll. Ya'll sound great. Open your bibles, please, to 1st Peter, chapter 1.

I count it a real joy and an honor to have the opportunity to share with you each week. And I just want to challenge you again today to continue to "Enlarge your Vision" in this coming year. Jesus said "All things are possible if we only believe". And we have to go past our limited thinking of the past and we have to broaden our horizon. And don't ever, ever give up on the dream that God has placed in your heart.

I know some of you have been believing God for a long time for certain things you've been praying about. And it just seems like nothing's happening. You say, Joel, I've prayed and I've prayed and I've prayed but nothing seems to change. God must not hear my prayers because I can't see any difference. But no friends, this is when your faith has to come in. The Bible says in Hebrews 11:1: Faith is the substance of the things that we hoped for, and the evidence of the things we cannot see". And what you must understand is that there will almost always be a period of time between the time you pray and the time the answer finally comes. And just because you don't see anything with your physical natural eyes during that time, it doesn't mean that God's not working in the background. It doesn't mean God's not working in the supernatural spiritual realm, because He is.

See, Victoria and I took a lot of pictures of our children this Christmas of them opening their presents. I got my camera out. I put a brand new roll of unexposed film into my camera, and I focused on my children and I clicked away. And now that film was exposed to the images of my children. But do you realize if I were to open up that camera and look at the film, it wouldn't have looked like anything would have happened. I couldn't see one picture that I just took. I could say, "Victoria, our camera must not be working because I can't see anything. The film just looks totally black."

But no, really the images are all there. I just can't see them with my natural eyes. The film has been exposed. The only problem is that I have not yet developed my film. Now, if I were to take that film to a developer, he would take me into a very dark, dark room. And he would slosh that film around in just the right solutions, and lo and behold, right before my very eyes, a miracle would occur. The images of my children would appear. They were there all the time. I just couldn't see it until I got it developed. But the reality is the moment that I snapped the picture that image was imprinted onto that film. And do you realize I have rolls of film at home that I shot 2, 3, even 6 months ago, that I have not yet gotten developed? But I'm not real worried about it. I'm not in any big hurry. I know the images are there. I know the pictures are there.

And friends, many times living the life of faith works much the same way. The Bible says in Psalm 56:9, "The very day we call for help, the tide of the battle turns". In other words, the very moment you pray, in the spirit world things begin to happen. God begins to set the miracle into motion.

The moment you pray in faith, your film, so to speak, is exposed. Now all you need to do is to have that film developed. And the Bible says in Hebrews 12:2 that Jesus is the developer of our faith. And I know maybe some of this may not sound too exciting but many times there is a "dark room" experience or a dark time that we

have to go through before the miracle is manifested. And the Bible calls it in 1st Peter chapter 1 "the trial of your faith". Listen to how the Living Bible puts it. First Peter, chapter 1, starting with verse 6: "So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here. These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether or not it is strong and pure."

After you pray in faith, you are going to go through a period of testing to where the enemy is going to do his best to try to get you down and discouraged so that your miracle will die stillborn. Some of you are going through that dark time right now. You say, "Joel, what should I do? Cry and complain and get depressed and worry night and day?" No friends, this is when you have to use your faith. This is when you have to mix just the right solutions with your film in order to bring that picture to reality. You say, what are those solutions? Number one, it is the Word of God. Number two, it is praise and thanksgiving. In your dark time, you have to continually speak forth the promises of God. You have to continually praise and thank God that the answer is on the way.

Like Phil Driscoll said Sunday night, you've got to change your atmosphere by changing the sounds all around you. If all you're exposed to is negative ungodly talk, then you've got to wake up and realize that your miracle cannot develop in that type of atmosphere. Friends, the dark hour is the time to shout forth the praises of God. You cannot stay down and depressed and defeated as long as you've got the praises of God coming out of your mouth. It is impossible.

See friends, praise is faith at work. And when you praise God in your dark hour, it literally drives the enemy crazy. He knows if you can praise and uplift the name of Jesus no matter what comes against you, he knows there's not anything you're not going to be able to accomplish.

See, the apostle Paul went through so many dark times. We think we have problems, but listen to what Paul went through. He said, five times I was given 39 lashes with a leaded whip for preaching the Gospel. He said, three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was even stoned for preaching the Gospel. He said, I was shipwrecked three times and once I even spent a night and day on the open sea. He went on to say, I've been tired, lonely, cold. I've been hungry, I've been thirsty. I've been in all kinds of incredible danger throughout my whole lifetime.

But I love how he described all these things in 2nd Corinthians 4:17. He said, "For all our light afflictions are but for a moment". Can you imagine the Apostle Paul had the audacity to call all he had been through "light afflictions"? Don't you know Satan's jaw dropped wide open when he heard that! I can see Satan look at one of his evil servants and say, Did I hear what I thought I heard? After all we put Paul through, he called them "light afflictions"? Yeah, friends, this drives the enemy crazy.

See, I can just imagine that Paul got right up into Satan's face in one of his darkest hours and he said, Listen here, Satan, you have done your best to try to kill me and try to discourage me from doing God's will throughout my whole lifetime. But here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to write down in God's eternal Word that these are only light afflictions so that people-(Applause) I'm going to write down that they're only light afflictions so that people now and a hundred years from now, and even a thousand years from now are going to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there's absolutely nothing that you can do to me or anybody else that bears the name of

Jesus to stop us from fulfilling God's purpose and destiny in our lives. See friends, that's the attitude we've got to have in the dark hours. We've got to show the enemy that we're more determined than he is. And even if all hell breaks loose, there is nothing that's going to stop us from continually uplifting and magnifying the name of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

See, but all too often we give up too easily. I'm convinced that the answer is just right around the corner. It's just about to appear, but we get a little weak in our faith and we start to listen to the lies of the enemy. And the moment he sees the smallest sign of weakening in your faith, he'll turn up the intensity and he'll make sure you have a great opportunity to doubt. If you're believing God for a miracle in your finances, he'll make sure you see everybody around you that's going bankrupt. He'll cause you to read every article that talks about how bad the economy is. He'll make sure every time you turn on the TV, something will discourage you. He can even cause people to come across your path that you know and love to somehow, some way speak a discouraging word over you. And it'll be like the winds taken out of your sail. It'll be like the straw that breaks the camel's back. And we finally just say, Forget it. I knew it wasn't going to happen. I knew nothing good ever happens to me.

But friends, listen, if we could see into the spirit world, I guarantee you, most of the time, the miracle we've been praying about is just a week or two away. But because we don't stand strong and keep the faith without wavering, we allow the enemy to deceive us and to believe that that miracle is never going to come to pass. And by our own actions, by our own lack of faith, we tie God's hands. And He's got to say, "Hold it!" He looks at the angels and says, "Stop that miracle right there. Don't send it. For some reason they've changed their minds."

But friends, we cannot give up that easily in this coming year. You've got realize you're going through a period of testing. The bible calls it "the trial of your faith". And Peter told us exactly what to do there in 1st Peter 1:6. He said to "greatly rejoice" in that dark hour. The Amplified says to "be exceedingly glad".

Now friends, that doesn't mean to bow your heads and with a long sour face say, "Oh God, I hate to bother you. God, I know You've got so many more important people to deal with and so much more important going on in your life than dealing with little old me. Besides God, I'm such a weak worm of the dust. I'm so unworthy, God. I'm such a sinner. I've done so much wrong in my life. But God if you could just somehow find the time to please help me and get me out of this mess that I've gotten myself in. God I'd really appreciate it." Friends, that's not greatly rejoicing. Do you know what that is? That's moaning and groaning and complaining about the situation.

When the bible says to "greatly rejoice", that means you've got to stand up tall and put your shoulders back, with a smile on your face, you've got to raise your hands toward the heavens. You've got to say: Father, I thank you that You are the great God that created this whole universe by Your mighty Word of power and there is no other God like You. And Father I thank you that I can say like the saints of old, You are my God and in You I put my trust and confidence. You're my Savior, my Deliverer, my Redeemer, my Healer, and my Helper.

And Father, I just greatly rejoice because Your Word says that "No weapon formed against me is going to prosper". (Applause) And Father, I thank you that every tongue raised against me in judgment you will condemn. Father I thank You that Your Word says You always cause me to triumph. And when my enemies come against me like a flood, Your spirit will raise up a barrier against them, Father. And Father, I thank you that "the Lord is my light and my salvation" and I don't have anybody to be afraid of, Father. Father, I greatly rejoice because Your Word says in Psalms that "you laugh at my enemies". So Father I just join in the laughter, I join in the fun. I say ha, ha devil. My answer's on the way! Amen!

See, friends, you cannot praise God like that and stay down in defeat. Do you want to get out of depression and overcome the dumps? Then you've got to stop talking about the problem and start talking about the solution. You've got to change your atmosphere by changing your words. Words are so powerful. They are creators. They can pick you up or they can tear you down. And the Bible says that, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." And you have to determine to create an atmosphere of faith, an atmosphere of victory, an atmosphere of hope by shouting forth the promises of God and shouting forth the praises of God. The bible says to "greatly rejoice" because the answer's on the way.

Listen, when everything around you looks dark and hopeless and you don't know how you're going to make it, you've got to change that atmosphere of defeat by boldly declaring, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". See, when your circumstances, when they look impossible and you can just feel the enemy trying to squeeze the very life out of you, you've got to change that atmosphere of defeat by boldly declaring, "If God be for me who dare be against me?" Listen friends, you and God are a majority. There's nothing that you can't do together. The Bible says to "greatly rejoice". Praise Him with joy! "The joy of the Lord is your strength". The happier you get, the stronger you'll become, and the more worried the enemy is going to get. (Applause)

Friends, we have to learn to magnify our God and lift up the name of Jesus more than ever in this coming year. There's enough people talking about the problem. We've got to concentrate on talking about the solution. If all we do is talk about how bad society is and how bad the economy is and how many bad things happen in the world, and how bad our relatives is-are and how impossible-how bad they be. How impossible it is for them to come to the Lord, then, you know, all that's doing is magnifying the problem and that results in a heaviness and it can even lead to depression. If all we do is only dwell on the negative things around us, we will become overwhelmed. Doubt and discouragement is going come in and it's going to try to stop us from even trying to change the situation. We'll throw up our hands and say "Just forget it. How am I ever going to make a difference?"

See, friends, when you magnify something, you make it bigger than it really is. Magnify means to enlarge in one's perception. When you magnify something, you don't alter the size of the object; you alter your perception of the size of the object. And when we only dwell on the negative circumstances in our lives; when we only focus on how bad everything is around us, all we're doing is magnifying and increasing and enlarging the negative information in our own minds.

But David said something so powerful in Psalm 34. So powerful and yet so simple. But it's so relevant for us today. He said, "Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us

exalt his name together." David said in effect, don't magnify your problems, don't magnify the negative circumstances in your life, don't magnify your difficulties, don't magnify all those adversities you're going through. He said, if you're going to magnify anything, make sure that you only magnify the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

And see friends, no matter how much we magnify God in our natural finite minds; no matter how big we make Him in our limited thinking, we still could never really comprehend how big and what an awesome God He really is. We can never do it. I heard a story about a little frog that was born at the bottom of this well. It was just a small circular well that you'd see like maybe at a typical little farm. And this frog was just so content. It was just he and his family that lived in that well. And he was just played all around the bottom of that well and swam around the water. And he thought, Man, life's never been so good. Me and my family have all the water in the world. But one day as he got a little older, he decided to venture out. He looked up there at the light at the top of that well and he climbed up the side of that well kind of anxiously. And for the first time he looked up over the edge of that well. And lo and behold, the first thing he saw was a pond. He couldn't believe it. It was thousands of times bigger than what he had.

He ventured out a little further and he came across this huge lake. And he just stood there in disbelief. He ventured out a little further and he eventually came to the ocean where all he could see were miles and miles of water. And he just stood there shocked beyond belief. And he began to realize how limited his thinking had really been. He thought he had all the water in the world but all he really had was a drop in the bucket compared to what God really wanted him to enjoy.

And see friends, I'm here to tell you today that God's dreams for your life are so much bigger and better and greater than you can even imagine. If God showed you where He really wanted you to end up, it would blow you away. You couldn't even fathom it.

The Living Bible says in 1st Corinthians 2:9, "No man has ever seen, heard, or even imagined the wonderful things God has in store for them that love the Lord." But most of the time we're just like that little frog. Our thinking is so limited. We've been raised in this little well. It's called our environment. We've formed values and opinions and beliefs all based upon those that have been around us and those that have raised us. Mainly our parents, moms, dads, brothers, sisters, friends. You're a product of your environment. And there's nothing wrong with that.

But sometimes, especially if those weren't people of faith, it can greatly hinder your vision and it can cause you to accept living a life that is far, far, far, from what God wants you to live. And I'm here today to tell you to enlarge your vision and climb up the side of that well and go a little further than you're used to going. Look out over the edge like that little frog did and just dream bigger dreams. God's got oceans out there that He really wants you to enjoy. And we must make up our mind to go beyond the status quo. Don't accept the status quo. Don't let how you were raised or where you were raised ever stop you from believing God for bigger and better things. We must always be pressing forth.

I think about my dad. He was raised from a family that was very, very poor. And they were very, very good people. I'm not saying anything about them. But their

vision was just so limited. They were in such poverty. All daddy knew was working on the farm and picking cotton. And there's nothing wrong with that. But when daddy got born again, when he gave his life to the Lord at 17 years of age, he knew God wanted him to do more than just work in the cotton fields the rest of his life. God placed in his heart a dream to minister to thousands of people. But in the natural it was impossible. How could he ever break free from that bondage of the past? That poverty? He didn't have any education. He was a drop out of high school.

But daddy never, ever let any of that stuff stop him. He never, ever gave up on the dream that God placed in his heart. He always stayed focused on the goal that God had placed before him. And thank God because daddy dreamed big dreams and he dared to step out in faith and to not be limited by his past. Daddy once and for all broke the curse of poverty in our family. And now, if Jesus carries, my children and my grandchildren down to five or ten generations, they are all going to experience the blessings of God. All because one man dared to step out of the mold and break free from the bondages of the past. He had to get rid of that thinking that he was raised with. (Applause)

And I don't mean any of this to sound wrong or offensive. But you should not remain at the same level as your parents-either spiritually or economically. God's dream is that every generation know Him more and go further with Him. We should always be increasing. God is a progressive God.

You say, Joel, you mean to tell me you think you can do more for God than your dad? Yes, I do. But I don't say that in an arrogant sense. Ya'll know me better than that. I don't say that prideful in my own ability. Not at all. I say that knowing that God's desire is that every generation increase in His anointing and increase in His wisdom and increase in His power. God wants us to always be increasing.

You can't accept the status quo. You've got to stir yourselves up and believe God for bigger things. You must be pressing forward. And we as a church must continue to enlarge our vision. There is no reason in the world in a city this size that we can't fill this place up four or five times on Sundays. See, I dream of the day when 8,000 young people will pack this place out every Friday night to shout the praises of God. (Applause) I dream of the day when thousands of college students and singles from all over this city will gather here every Monday night to boldly and unashamedly worship our Risen Savior. I dream of the day when we'll be teaching the Bible down here every day during the week-empowering and training a new generation of leaders. See, and I dream of the day when my mom will have a healing service down here every week day at noon for people that need a touch of God's healing power.

See, I want Lakewood to be a haven for this city and for this world to where people can come at any time and experience God's incredible power and His presence and to feel His awesome love. See, that's what changes people. We've got all these beautiful facilities that God has given us debt-free. We've got to always be reaching for higher heights and trying to do more for God.

You say, Joel, that sounds like that would be a lot of work. And that sounds like that would take a lot of time and effort and energy on my part. How can we possibly all do this? Friends, we can't do it in our own strength. That's the good part. We're going to have to totally and completely rely on the Holy Spirit to help us. But God promises us-He said in His Word, "He that spared not his own son but delivered him

up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things". In other words, God is saying that when our main focus is to help the hurting and the lost and the suffering of this world, there is absolutely nothing that God won't freely give to us. He will give us wisdom. He will freely give us the money, the finances, the resources. He will freely give us the know-how. He will freely give us the strength to carry out His will. All God's looking for is people with a big vision. God's looking for people that will dream big dreams.

And we cannot as a church become too comfortable. God is presenting us with new and greater challenges. And we must be quick to accept change. And I'm telling you, I believe you guys are the best of the best. Ya'll are God's most faithful people. I believe ya'll are the top choice of God's chosen. Ya'll are the cream of the crop.

I was telling them earlier that last Sunday was our first Sunday to conduct our two morning worship services. And the enemy told me that nobody was going to show up at that first service. He told me it was going to be just me and my mom and a few others. And I told him I'd still go ahead and preach because I know my mom needs to hear my sermons. But the enemy told me that nobody was going to show up. But when I drove up last Sunday morning, 45 minutes before that first service was to begin, I saw hundreds and hundreds of cars already in the parking lot. I thought that's no place but Lakewood. God's most faithful people. And do you know, last Sunday morning we ministered to over 11,000 adults-the most in our history. And listen to this, we had over 1,650 children studying God's Word. That's almost 60% more than we had a year ago. And listen, here's something more exciting than all that. In the last two weeks, we've had over 500 people walk down these aisles to make Jesus the Lord of their lives. Isn't that great? (Applause)

It is such an exciting time to be alive. And I just want to challenge you again to dream big dreams. Stir up your faith and stretch your faith. Broaden your horizon. Get rid of that limited thinking of the past. Just because your dream hasn't come true yet doesn't mean that God is not working in the background. Certainly He is. He's working in the supernatural realm. You've just got to stand strong and remain faithful. Remember, you're going through the trial of your faith and your faith is in the process of being developed. Don't dare give in to discouragement. You've got to show the enemy that you are more determined than he is. And in our time of need, we've got to do exactly what Peter said. He said to "Rejoice greatly" because you know that you know that you know that your answer is on the way and that victory is ours! Amen? Come on! Let's give Him a good hand clap.

HOLD ONTO YOUR DREAMS

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_HOTYD_001 – 2/21/99

JOEL: (Applause) Y'all are embarrassing me. Y'all don't have to clap. I know you love me. No matter how much you clap, I'm still nervous. Somebody wrote me. They said, "Joel, slow down, we can't understand you." But I talk fast because I want to remember the next thing that I want to say. When it comes to me I think, I got to say it; there it is.

But, y'all can be seated a second. I want to talk to you a couple minutes to get warmed up before I get going. I have to tell you what an honor it is for me to be up here. I'm always thrilled. You know we miss my dad. But you know we're going to continue on. Great things are ahead for this church. And, I really believe our greatest days are ahead. Don' you? (Applause)

You know I know my dad. He would be so thrilled to see so many people here continually. Our offerings have been up. And it's just a great honor and a privilege for me to be able to stand up here in front of you.

I know my mom mentioned about April and Gary. They had their fourth child. You know it's hard for me to believe that my little sister has four kids. But it confirms something. It confirms two things I was thinking about, driving here this morning. It confirms number one that I'm getting old. It confirms number two: I always knew there was something wrong with April. From when I was little, I knew she was abnormal. And this confirms it, anybody that would want to have four kids.

But listen, Victoria and I, we had our second baby just three and a half months ago. We had little Alexandra. And you know I was in the delivery room like men are nowadays. And I saw what a painful experience she went through. And you know I saw all that. And I thought, you know God, this is gonna be our last baby. (Applause) I know Victoria well enough. She's not going to do this again. But it was funny. After we had that baby and we had her like an hour, Victoria said something that really shocked me. We were playing with it and seeing how beautiful she was. And she said, "Joel," she said, "I'm so excited. We can have as many kids as you want to have." Wait, there's more to the story. And I thought, man, the Lord answers my prayer. But she said, "Under one condition." And I thought, "I wonder what that is?" She said, "We can have as many babies as you want as long as you have the baby." (Laughter) I told her, two sounds good to me. Two's the perfect number.

But, you know I had my taste of having four kids just this week. Wednesday night leaving church, April and Gary were going to go have their baby, so we took little Christiana home. She's like five or six years old, a really good child. And then I took Don and Jacqueline's little girl home, Elizabeth. She's two years old. And then I had Jonathan sitting next to her. They're real good buddies. And then I had little Alexandra. And I told Victoria when we were in the car, I said, "Man, now we're going to get a taste of what it's like to have four kids. This is gonna be what it's like."

And we were gonna drive home about a 25 minute drive. And I got to tell you it wasn't a pleasant experience. (Laughter) I mean I think the Lord was telling me something. We got going down the road and my little girl that's three months old, she started crying to the top of her lungs because she was hungry. And when she's hungry, she wants the whole world to know. Like kids do. But anyway she cried and there was nothing we could do but get home. But, Christiana had fallen asleep and she'd went on to fall on Jonathan and Elizabeth. And they went on to tell me you know how much that bothered them the whole way home. And of course, you've got to remember that little baby is crying to the top of her lungs. So when Jonathan had to tell me, he'd say (screaming) "Daddy, she's bothering me." That went on for twenty minutes. Finally by the time we got home, you know my nerves were gone. Victoria said, "Would you put them to bed?" I said, "We ought to let those kids put us to bed." I mean I know what it's like. I thought I don't need four kids. Sanity is more important to me than having four kids. Staying sane. See, I know what, I know what it does now. I know what us Osteen kids did to my mom. It's our fault. It's our fault for making her like that.

But listen (laughter) listen. (Laughter) I got to tell you about my mom, though. My mom's a real celebrity now. I got a call from Gene over at the Houston Astros and he said, "Joel, we want to see if your mom will throw out the first pitch of one of our Astros ball games." (Applause) He said, "Do you think she'll do it?" I said, "I know she'll do it. She'd love to do it." The only thing I thought about, I didn't tell him, but I thought I don't know if she can throw the ball that far. But I got to thinking about all those times she pinched me growing up with that right arm. I told Jene she could probably throw a 90mile an hour fast pitch. Keeping me in line in church. But anyway, I like to have fun in church. That's the way daddy was, wasn't it?

Hey, I've gotten a lot of good letters and I appreciate you people writing me and giving me encouraging notes. And I got a couple of emails that were funny. I thought I'd share with you. Because I like to have fun and I don't mind laughing at myself or laughing at what people say about me anyway. Somebody sent me an email. They said, "Joel, you sound like your dad, a little bit like your dad, a little bit like your mom, and a little bit like Will Rogers." (Laughter) I went home and asked Victoria, Who's Will Rogers? I was trying to find out if that was a compliment or not. I thought just leave me in my ignorance. I think it's because I sound country to me. But, another guy wrote me and I'm sure he was having fun too. He said, "Joel, you sound like your dad, you look like your dad; in 30 years you'll probably be as good as your dad." (Laughter) I wrote him back (Applause) Oh no, you don't have to... I wrote him back I said, "You think I can get there in only 30 years?" Daddy was one of a kind, one of a kind. We miss him and we love him. But we're continuing on. And it's a testimony to him of what kind of church he built by all of you being here. He built this church on the solid rock of Jesus Christ and the Word. Isn't that great? (Applause)

Okay, now we can stand. Let's make our confession. Y'all ready? All right. I'm going to say it right. I told you Sunday night I've been saying it wrong. I've been corrected. I'm going to say it right.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly

confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen. (Amen.)

SERMON: You may be seated. (Applause) Y'all sound good. Y'all are wild. Like daddy used to say, for you visitors: if you fall down dead, we'll raise you.

Open your bibles if you would to Judges, chapter 6. Judges chapter 6. I want to talk to you today about, "Holding on to your dreams." Holding on to your dreams. When I say dreams I'm talking about the desires and the things that are deep within your heart. I want to talk to you about never letting go of those dreams. You see if we're living in accordance to God's will and have a heart that follows after God, God puts desires and thoughts and dreams in all of our hearts. How many of you have some things that you want to see accomplished in your life? See, everybody here does.

And many times those dreams get blurred by the circumstances of life. And a lot of times, they'll get pushed down and they'll just go down far. And we don't think that we can accomplish those things. Well what I want to challenge you with today and every time I'm out here is doing more for God. Going further, stepping out in faith, and doing what God wants us to do. You see, I've used daddy's death in my life as a new challenge. It's time to move on. It's time to go further. The hour is late. Time is short. We're here but for a little amount of time. What God wants us to do, we need to step out and do for Him.

And, you know He puts those dreams and desires in our heart. God put them there, and we must realize that He wants to see them come to pass. He's the One that put them there. And, you see if you don't have a dream and if you don't have any desires, you're not going to have any purpose. That's not the way God wants us to be. No dreams, no desires; you're not going to have any purpose. You're going to be a miserable person. You're going to be just existing. You're not going to be motivated. But God doesn't want us to be like that. He always wants us to be reaching forward to new heights. And He wants us to see those things accomplished in us that He's put in there. That's why He said, "Stir up that gift that's within us."

That's why I always want to challenge you, you know. God's waiting on us. A lot of times we say we're waiting on God. No, God's waiting on us. And all through the bible, through the book of Psalms especially, it talks about how God wants to fulfill those desires within our heart. Let me read you a couple. Psalms 37:4 says, "Be delighted with the Lord. Then he will give you all your heart's desires." The Amplified version says, "He will give you the secret petitions in your heart." How many of you have some secret things you want to accomplish for God? Sure you do.

Listen to Psalm 145:19. It says, He will fulfill the desire of those who reverently and worshipfully fear him." See that's us. God wants to fulfill those desires that are down deep within our heart. Many times, time has a way of lessening our dream and weakening our dream. And sometimes we look off and the dream looks so far away. It seems like it could never come to pass. But don't ever think that. Stir up that gift. Really it's a time to cultivate our dreams. Really it's a time to find them, to feed

them, to put them in good soil. It's a time to water those dreams. And believe that they will come to pass.

Well, one of the first things you have to do if you're going to reach out and hold on to your dreams and turn those dreams into reality, you've got to--before you can change the present situation, you need to look ahead. You need to look ahead to where you want to be. You can't get bogged down in the here and the now. Sometimes the circumstances around you will get you too full of doubt. You got to set some goals really of where you want to be. I think that's why Habakkuk wrote in the book of Habakkuk, God said in Habakkuk 2:2--it's a very familiar scripture. He said, "Write the vision and engrave it so clearly that anyone who even goes by fast will see it quickly and easily."

The first thing we need to do if we're going to hold on to our dreams is to write the vision down clearly. In other words, what are you believing God for? Are you believing God for a happy marriage? Well, write that down. God I'm believing you for this. And keep that vision in front of you. Some of you are probably believing God that God will maybe use you more. Maybe you're believing God that you know you'll come out of debt and you'll pay off your house. And whatever it is, write that vision down clearly. It's good to set it before you because you know what happens when you do that, when the enemy comes in and adversities of life come about you, the vision's still written down. It's still very clear. Here's what God, I'm believing You to do in my life. You see what I'm getting at? Set some goals. The bible says, "Where there's no vision, the people perish."

And if you're in a position of leadership, if you're a parent, it's even more important to set those goals. Write that vision down. What are you believing God for? Some of you are believing God that He'll break some habits in your life. Some of you are believing God to, you know, to come into a new area of ministry. Whatever it is.

I know for my household, I have the vision very clear that Victoria and I and our household, we're going to serve God 100%. And we're going to be an example to this city and to this world of what it means to live a godly, spirit-filled life. See the vision's there. And then when things come up against it, I say, Well, I wonder if that fits in with our vision. See if it doesn't, you just, you just push it aside. The goal is clear, the vision's clear. When you have vision, it gives you focus, it propels you. You get up each morning with a spring in your step. It motivates you.

See, that's the way God wants us to be, is reaching out for our dreams. If you don't have that, like I said while ago, you're not going to be motivated. You're going to be a miserable person. And some of you today may say, Joel, you know I don't have any dreams; I don't have any desires. They may have been so pushed down in the past. But I'll tell you this, you write down, God, give me my dreams and desires back. And God will restore those dreams that were once in your heart. Because I'm convinced they're all there. And if you get quiet before God, and if you seek His face, He will tell you what He wants to do. Do you believe me this morning? (Yes)

All right, everybody's quiet. Am I talking too fast? Okay, listen, write the vision.

The second thing we need to do is see ourselves as God sees us. This is very important. See ourselves as God sees us. We have to get the image of God. Get God's image on the inside of us. You see every dream starts with a picture. Every

dream starts with a picture. Until you can picture yourself fulfilling your dream, you're not going to see it. It's not going to come to pass. The bible says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7. You can't have these thoughts of doubt and unbelief. You've got to see your vision; you've got to see that dream coming true.

See, we think--words create pictures. Words create pictures. Think of this. When I say the word "dog," you don't think of d-o-g, you think of an animal. Right? If I say a big, black dog, it's changing those pictures in your mind. If I say a big, black playful dog. See, all these words are creating pictures. What we need to do folks is get God's word and let His word paint the picture of how God sees us.

You see, I believe our heart is an open canvas. And we're painting pictures every day. What kind of pictures are you painting? Well, see what you need to do is you need to find the place where it's written. We hear this all the time in this church. But find the place where it's written concerning your dream and your desire. Get those scriptures and let those scriptures paint the picture of how God sees you on the canvas of your heart. See what I'm getting at? Everyday we're painting pictures. We need to use God's word to paint those pictures.

Really, that's what my mom did in 1981. Most of you know the story. But I'll tell you again. My brother Paul called me when I was at Oral Roberts University going to college. And he said, "Joel, momma's very sick." And I'd never seen mother sick one day in her life. She always mowed the lawn with me and worked in the garden with me. She was so active. Everyday we grew up as kids, five or six kids, she always had a hot breakfast for us. You know, I'm not, I'm not saying it was any good, but she had something for us to eat. (Laughter)

I feel like I got to wake y'all up. Y'all are so quiet. Okay, everybody listen.

No, look, I'd never seen my mother sick a day in my life and I didn't want to hear that. And I said, "Paul, she's probably, you know there's nothing wrong." And I called her and she didn't sound that good. But long story short, Paul called me again and said, "Joel, they're taking her to the hospital." And I came home from college. And I'll never forget my dad picked me up from the airport. And he met me at the gate but he wasn't quite there yet. He was coming down that big aisle way. I'd never seen my dad look like that in all my life. He was, the concern and the stress on his face, he looked like he'd aged 20 years. It was a pitiful sight. It was a sad day in our house. The doctors came. Long story short, the doctor said, "You know, Joel, your mom's got cancer of the liver. She doesn't have long to live." I mean this was, you know, she was probably less than 50 years old. It was a sad day. But you know it's real interesting what happened. Because momma came home and we prayed and we did all that. But mother never looked at the circumstances around her. You've got to get your eyes off the circumstances around you. You'll never think your dreams going to come true. But she never did that. She never went to bed. She looked terrible. Her skin was yellow. She only weighed 89 pounds. But she got in the bible and she found all these scriptures on healing. And do you know what she was doing everyday? She was painting a picture of herself as a healthy, whole person just the way God saw her. See, that's what's so important. (Applause)

You see if we look at the natural circumstances, in the natural, none of your dreams may come to pass. You can't look at that. You've got to go back to the bible and say,

you know, here's what God's word says about me. And use that. Let Him paint the pictures. Mom, momma went even a step further. She put pictures all around the house of when she was healthy and whole and when she was, when she was at her best. This is when she was riding the horses in the hills of Montana. But she, basically, she was doing with these pictures just what God's word says. Seeing herself as a happy and a whole person.

Well, see that's what so important. And now you know momma's up here stronger than ever. What is that? Eighteen or 19 years ago healed by the power of God. Her dream came to reality. (Applause)

See, you can't talk defeat, think defeat, say I'm a negative person and say all these things. You've got to remember, when you're saying all that, you're painting the picture. Just imagine somebody on your heart painting the picture. Well, I can't overcome. Okay, let's, let's paint you defeated. Well, my family's never done that. See, you're painting the wrong type of picture. We've got to see ourselves as God sees us.

It reminds me of that story my dad tells of that guy named Clyde. You've all heard it. But Clyde was always blaming God. "And God, why do you do this to me? God, why do you do that to me? I've had all this hardship, God. Why is this all happening to me?" And it got quiet a minute and a voice came from heaven, a big thunderous voice, and said, "I don't know Clyde; there's just something about you that ticks me off." (Laughter)

You know and what that's illustrating is some people think God's out to get them. God's not out to get you. God sees you as an overcomer. He sees you as victorious. He sees you living an abundant life. That's His dream for you. God wants these dreams that are in our heart; He wants them to come to pass. But it's so important for us.

You know I was reading where psychologists tell us that there's two main memory files in every person's memory. Two main file cabinets, think of it that way. File number one is a file of all your failures, all your defeats, all the painful memories in your life, all those hardships. File number two is the file of your victories, the file of your accomplishments, the things that you're most proud of. And they tell us that the way a person's outlook on life usually is dependent on which file cabinet you go back to. And you know, how many of you know people that all they do is go back and where out that file of the past? You know what, they use it three or four times every day. And that file of their victories is never even used.

And I want to tell you today, you know you can't change the past. You can't change the past. You can learn from the past. But you ought to forget the past and quit living in the past and go on and reach out to hold on to your dreams for God. (Applause)

See, the bible says in Philippians 3:13, "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are ahead." See, forget the past. If you do go back at all, don't you go back to that negative file. You go back to your victory file. You go back to the time when you remember that God healed Dodie. You go back to the victories in your own life. Even if you only have one victory you go back to that

one. And you say, "Joel, what might that be?" Well, how about the time God saved you? When He called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (Applause)

See, we all have victories. It's just how we look at it. See, that's so important. Let me say this about failure. I don't want you to take this negative but there is a chance that all of us sometime in life will fail. You know, and I don't want that to be negative. But let me prove this to you. How many have never failed? Is there anybody here that's never failed? See, I think everybody's telling the truth this morning. You know, there is a chance that we've all failed. But listen, you cannot let the fear of failure stop you from chasing your dreams. This is an important point. Do not let the fear of failure stop you from doing what God wants you to do. You see, if I was scared to fail, I would not be up here this morning. I gotta tell you the truth. There's a chance I could forget what I'm going to say. You know? But we got to-- God's looking for people that will step out in faith. They're not afraid to fail. They're willing to, you know, risk a little bit, dare to do things for God.

You know, we're talking about writing the vision for this church. Well, the vision our family has for this church is that this church would be strong and healthy. Not filled just once on Sunday morning. But I dream of the day when it's filled twice on Sunday morning. When people are so hungry to hear God's Word. I dream of the day when we won't give just \$4 or \$5 million dollars a year to our missions projects, but we'll give \$40 or \$50 million dollars a year. Do you see what I mean? We're putting a big dream. But listen, here's the reason I tell you that. If that's going to happen, then all of us, not just me, all of us individually and collectively are going to have to step out in faith and get out of our little comfort zone and know that God wants to bless us. And reach for our dreams. If we're going to give that kind of money, God's got to give you some of that kind of money so you can tithe it back into His kingdom. Do you see what I mean? If we're going to see those people come to church you're going to have to witness to your neighbors. Step out and bring them, get them interested in the things of God.

But we can't be afraid of failure. I think so many times that that keeps us back. I was reading where Abraham Lincoln, he was defeated 10 times in a row. In 27 years, Abraham Lincoln never won one political race. He was defeated 10 times in a row. And I was thinking about no doubt, his so-called friends of that day, they probably hit him on the back after about race number five and said, "You know, Abe, you're not going to run again are you? You're wasting our time. You don't have a chance. You're batting zero, man." You know all the circumstances of his life or his present-day looked like he would never win. He went on, he ran eight times. He ran nine times. He ran ten times. Never won one political race. It even said between one of the two races he had a nervous breakdown. But do you know what happened? Abraham Lincoln, he never gave up. He always reached for his dream. You know the very first race he'd ever won was in 1860. And do you know what it was for? It was for the Presidency of the United States. The very first one he won. He won it all, man.

You know when you think about it. You may have failed many times. You may have been knocked down many times. But I want to tell you this morning, I don't know care how many times, the next time you win could be your biggest victory ever. (Applause)

I believe that wholeheartedly. God, you know, just as you might fail, you may succeed. God's on your side and I know every time I've failed—I hate to fail—but you know I learned something. I learned what not to do next time. I come out stronger and I'm not going to, you know, I believe I'm not going to fail the next time. But you can't be scared of failure. I'd rather have tried and failed than to have not tried and never have known. See what I mean? I read where all men fail, the great ones get back up. You see when it's very simple. God sees you as a learner. I read this quote from Theodore Roosevelt. He said, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure; rather than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in a gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

You know it's not a day to sit back here and say, God I know you want me to do something. But I might get out there and do that. But no, no, no, I'm not going to get out there. That's a dangerous position over there. I might fail. You can't do that. You're too comfortable if you're doing that. We need to, you know, hey, if I'm stepping out and I'm up here. This is my fifth time in four weeks, and I hadn't done it once in 35 years. Hey, if I'm doing it, you've got to do it too. You've got to come with me. (Applause)

But we're talking about seeing ourselves as God sees us. Get God's image on the inside of you. Don't be afraid of failure. Write the vision down clearly. Have some goals. Don't think your dream can't come to pass.

I want you to look at Judges, chapter 6. Now we'll see the story of Gideon. I get to my text at the very end to make sure I can get through it all. This is the story of Gideon. This is interesting because Gideon saw himself very different than God saw himself. And in the book of Judges, chapter 6, verse 12, it says: "The angel of the Lord appeared unto Gideon and said, The Lord is with you, you mighty man of fearless courage." I'm reading out of the Amplified there. God called Gideon a mighty man of fearless courage. But as you read on and we'll tell the story in a minute, you'll realize that Gideon didn't see himself as a mighty man. He didn't see himself as one of fearless courage. No doubt if he had a friend with him, he'd probably was laughing saying, this guy thinks I'm the one of fearless courage. He's got the wrong guy. You know there's no doubt. It goes on to, look at verse 14. The angel said to him, "Go in your might and you shall save Israel from the hand of Midian." In verse 15 in the King James Version, look at what it says: "Gideon said, Oh my Lord." Isn't that what we say many times when God tells us to do something? It sounds like a Texan, "Oh my Lord." He no doubt put his hand on his head and said, "Oh my Lord, this guy's got the wrong guy." I mean that's what he said. Look he said, "Behold my family is poor in Manasseh. I am the least in my father's house." God just called him a mighty man of courage. You see how we got to get God's image on the inside of us? God sees us so differently many times than we see ourselves. And it went on to say, the Lord said, "Surely I will be with you. You shall smite the Midianites as one man." As one man, that's the way God saw him. In verse 17 he said, if I found favor, if I'm going to do this, you're going to have to show me a sign. You're going to have to show me a sign. How many of us are like that today? God, if you're speaking to me, show me something supernatural. I'm the same way.

Well, God showed him the sign. Let me tell you the rest of the story. The angel told him to make some flour cakes and to place it on some rocks out in the desert or wherever they were under that tree. He said, pour some broth over it and let me

show you what I'll do. And Gideon did that. He was obedient. And the angel of the Lord came and tipped the tip of its staff on to the rocks there and the flour cakes just exploded. The consumed themselves in fire. And do you know what? Gideon believed at that point. He said, God, I believe that's you speaking to me. But it's still interesting to see what happens. Look in verse 25. The angel said, "Go down and destroy the altars of Baal." Go down there and destroy the altars of Baal and get rid of all that idol worship and all those altars down there. But what I really wanted you to see is verse 27. Verse 27: "Gideon did as the Lord told him. But because he was too afraid of the men of the city, he did it at night." He still was not a man of fearless courage. After he even seen the sign from the Lord.

You see how God sees us? God sees us so differently than we see ourselves. And I think about if the angel of the Lord came this morning and started talking to us, I'd like to think this, and he gave us a supernatural sign. He exploded this podium right here before us or not this podium, some other podium. We need this podium. But he gave us a supernatural sign and we saw it and then God told us to do something. I'd like to think that we would do it wholeheartedly. But here Gideon--I'm not ragging on Gideon because I'm going to see him one day. But, he still didn't even go wholeheartedly. He says, I'll go God, but I'm not going during the daytime because I'm afraid of the men. I'm going to go at night.

You see, God sees us so differently. I know when God chose Moses to be the leader over there, do you know one of the first things he said, God you're not choosing me, I'm not eloquent in speech. Do you see what I mean? God sees us so differently.

So, I'm going to continue more on this later, but I just wanted to give you this, this morning and encourage you to reach out and chase your dreams. See yourself as God sees you. Don't be afraid of failure.

Listen, Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, "With men it's impossible, but with God, all things are possible." How many times have we seen my dad talk about you can be with men or you can be with God? See you have a choice. The choice is up to us. Are we going to see ourselves as God sees or as men sees us?

I think about the story daddy used to tell about the bumblebee. Do you know the bumblebee, by all scientific data, the bumblebee can't fly. It's not supposed to fly. They did all these aeronautical studies on it and its body is too big for it's little wings. But you know what? Thank God, the bumblebee can't understand our language or somebody probably would have talked him out of flying. You know what? When God told that bumblebee to fly, it just flies. It defies the law of nature. And that's what we got to realize when we're searching for our dreams and we're holding on to our dreams and believing they'll come into reality. Sometimes it's not going to look right in the natural. But if we trust God, He can do the supernatural and He can cause our dreams to come to pass. (Applause)

That's all I have this morning. (Applause)

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS, PART 2"

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JOEL: I don't know if you've ever heard—the kids say the funniest things. But, I don't know if y'all ever heard that saying about when you get up and speak in public, if you want to build your confidence you imagine your audience as if they were in their undergarments? (Laughter) Has anybody ever heard that? All of you have. Let me tell you it doesn't work. (Laughter)

But after service not too long ago, this little boy came up to me and he was going to give me that bit of advice. Some how he had heard that. But he got it backwards and he told me this, he said, "Joel, when you get up there in front of all those people, you just imagine yourself as if you're out there in your underwear." (Laughter) I told him I really appreciated that. That helped me. I said, "Listen, before you leave, the next time you have some advice you go see my sister, Lisa." (Laughter)

But this other little girl came up to me the other day and she said, "Joel," she was about 5 or 6 too. And she said, "Joel," she said, "I really like to hear you speak." She said, "My favorite things though are your stories." She said, "As a matter of fact, I'd leave all that other boring stuff out." (Laughter) That's funny, isn't it? (Laughter)

Are y'all ready to study your bible? Let's stand up and make our confession, if we would. Say it like you mean it, now.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen. (Amen.)

God bless you. You may be seated.

SERMON: Open your bibles if you would to the book of Hebrews, Chapter 10. I want to continue to talk to you today on "Holding on to your Dreams." Holding on to those God-given dreams and desires and thoughts and goals that are deep within your heart. How many of you have some things that you want to accomplish for God? Sure, all of us do. And what I want to challenge you with is that many times over time and through the circumstances in life and the things that come against us, the obstacles we face, many times these dreams get pushed aside. They get pushed down and sometimes we think they can never come to pass. But how I want to challenge you today and for the next few weeks to never let go of your dreams. Never give up. Be determined. God can see your dreams and those desires come to pass.

We must realize that God is the one that put the dreams and desires there. I believe they're the start of getting into God's perfect will. That's why He puts them there.

And really it's a time to cultivate our dreams. It's a time to feed our dreams. Stir up the gift that's within us.

I know ever since daddy's died, daddy passed away, it's given me a new challenge that we have to make our lives count. What we do for God we must do now. Time is short. The hour is late. And it won't be long till we're all going to be up there with daddy. What a challenge I feel. Don't you feel that too? We need to make our lives count. We need to chase our dreams and not just sit back in our comfort zones or we're never going to be all God wants us to be.

The Bible talks in the book of Philippians about pressings toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Stir up that gift. It's deep within you.

And I want to read today from Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 23. Look at that if you would. It says, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised." Hold fast, folks, I believe is the key. Hold fast on to your dreams. Hold on to the promises of God. Hold on to what God has told you. Know that it can come to pass.

You see, you've got to realize that God never promised us that this life would be a bed of roses. He never said we'd go to heaven on flowery beds of ease, as much as that may disappoint you. But He did say this, Jesus said this, He said in this life you're going to have hardships, you're going to have tribulation. You're even going to have distress. But He said be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

You see, God has made a way for all of us to overcome. He's made a way for us to be victorious. But it's up to us; it's not up to Him. He's already made the way. It's up to us to hold fast to the things that God has told us. Hold fast. Be determined.

And if you're taking notes today, I want to tell you that word "Hold fast" in the Greek come from a word called, "Katecho." I'm going to spell it for you. K-a-t-e-c-h-o, katecho; it's a compound of 2 words. Kata is k-a-t-a and that implies, it carries the idea of coming down with force. Now you've got to listen to this. Listen to how descriptive the Holy Spirit was when He was telling us to hold on. Kata means to come down with force. Echo, the second part of the compound is e-c-h-o. It is defined as "I have or I possess." Do you know what the Holy Spirit was saying when you put those 2 words together, in the original Greek. He was saying not only to embrace, but to hold on with force, to embrace with force. He's saying in other words, take a firm grip and pull it deep down into your heart. In other words, the Holy Spirit knew that there would be things in life that would try to steal our dreams. He knew there would be things that try to take away our dreams. Maybe it's time; maybe it's circumstances; maybe it's obstacles we have to overcome. But it really struck me as being so descriptive here. God says to hold on, take a firm grip and pull it deep within your heart. Never let go of your dreams.

I like to think about it almost as if it's a rope. You see, growing up I had a rope swing. And we used to jump off of a platform a little higher than this. And we'd jump on to that rope and man, you had to grab that rope or you were going to hit the ground. You had to grab it with force.

And I believe, I like to think of my dreams and our desires as if we're holding on to a big old rope. And we're just pulling it down deep into our heart. And you've got to realize, folks, that there's somebody on the other end of that rope wanting to pull that out of your life. You see what I mean? We've got to hold on so tightly.

And some of us today, we need to reach up and take a new firm grip of the things God has told us, get a better grip and pull it down deep within our heart, deep within our heart. Amen. Go ahead and give the Lord a handclap. (Applause)

You see really, you've got to show the enemy you're more determined than he is. And if you just think about you've got this rope and how dare somebody try to pull that dream out of your heart over time, over-for any reason. You hold on tightly. Show the enemy you're more determined than he is.

Really folks, for your dream, it's got to be a burning desire. It's got to be something that you live for, you breathe for. I'm not talking about something you just pray for one week and three weeks later you forget about it. No, I'm talking about those things that are deep down within your heart. And our attitude about those is that we live for them, we breathe for them. We pursue them; we go after these dreams. Show the devil we're more determined than he is. Never let go.

When I think of determination, I think of my mom. She's a determined person. You know growing up momma wanted a swimming pool. She wanted a swimming pool really bad. Now this principle-I know a swimming pool is a material thing, but just listen to me. I want you to listen to the principle of determination and never letting go.

Daddy loved her very much and loved all of us kids very much. He would do anything for us. He would buy us anything. He bought us chickens when we wanted chickens. He bought us rabbits. We had a goat one time. We had 2 dogs. Tamara and all the girls were in cheerleading. I was in baseball. He would do anything for us. And he would buy anything for my mother. But he did not want a swimming pool. That's the one thing he didn't want. And he told my mother, he said, "Dodie," he said, "I'll buy you anything in the world. But I don't want a swimming pool. It's too much maintenance. It's too hard to keep up with. It's dangerous." And you know, that just went in one of my mother's ear and out the other ear. (Laughter) Almost as if there was nothing in-between. (Laughter) No. I'm just kidding. You know I'm kidding. (Laughter)

But you know, momma was so determined, she never gave up. She just almost ignored it. And a month or 2 went by and here's momma again. We were out in the backyard and I remember her calling my dad over. And it happened just like this. She didn't even tell them what she was talking about. She said, "John, I think if we angel it just right, we can get it right here." (Laughter) And she said, "We can put the flower beds over there. And this is the pathway up." And I remember daddy looking at her like, "Woman, you are crazy. What are you talking about?" She was determined. And she said, "John, about that swimming pool." He said, "Dodie, we're not going to have a swimming pool." This went on month after month. And of course, we were pulling for my mom. (Laughter) We wanted it. But mother was determined. It was a burning desire.

And I remember another time daddy was out there hitting me ground balls on a hot summer day and mother used the opportunity to come out there. And she said, "John, wouldn't it be fun to jump in our pool when you get through playing baseball?" (Laughter) She was so determined. And my poor dad, he didn't know what to do.

But you know one day—we used to travel with my dad during the summer time when he went around the country to speak. And one day we were at a hotel lobby and daddy was about to speak and a man came up to my mom and dad. And he introduced himself. He said I'm so-and-so. He said, "I build swimming pools for a living." (Laughter) And I saw daddy's eyes roll back in the back of his head. (Laughter) He knew this was trouble. And you know my mom. She gave him that million-dollar smile and gave him that big hug. And said, "Where have you been, old buddy, old pal." (Laughter) She said, "We've been waiting for you."

And he went on to say, he said, "I want to build you a swimming pool." And my dad said, "Oh man, we appreciate that. But we really can't afford it and we really don't have room for it." He said, "Pastor," he said, "I don't want you to pay for it. I want to give it to you. Won't you let me give you a swimming pool." Momma was—that was a burning desire and God answered momma's prayer.

And you know, I'll never forget that we were on another trip and he built it while we were gone. And we came back and all of us kids ran back there. It was a beautiful swimming pool. It was down into the earth. It was a nice expensive one. And we all ran and jumped in. Mother even got in. And here comes daddy to get in. (Laughter) And I remember what momma said. She said, "John, don't you even think about getting into my pool." (Laughter)

But momma was so determined. And that pool was a lot of maintenance. And some how I got elected to clean the pool. And I meant to tell my mom, the next time she believes God for something that needs maintenance, you believe him for a maintenance man too. (Laughter)

But you know that's a simple principle of determination. But listen, in 1981 she wasn't believing God for a swimming pool, her burning desire was to live. See it had changed. We need to learn the principles of God. We need to be determined. We need to never give up. We need to reach up today, I think, and take a firm grip, hold on to the promise of God. Hold on no matter what the circumstances look like. And that's what she did in 1981 when everything looked bad. When they said she didn't have any chance to live. She ignored daddy. She ignored those circumstances, those voices of doubt, and she went on. And God gave her her miracle.

You know what I believe, folks, is God has ignited a fire in every one of us. You know what fire is. Fire is a consuming force. Once it's ignited, it will intensify and grow if it has the right properties around it, like fuel and oxygen. And I believe that when we become born again, God puts dreams and desires into our heart. And they're like a little fire. They're like a little, maybe like a pilot light.

And do you know some people go for a month or two or six months or a year with just that little flame. Do you know some people go for a whole lifetime and it never changes. That's a real tragedy. Because that desire that God's put in your heart is

tied to His perfect will. It's when you start reaching out to your dreams, that's what God really wants you to do.

That's how I started. My desire was in TV. And you know I reached out and God helped me in that area.

But what I want you to do today is you've got to realize you've got to add fuel to your fire. You're got to add fuel to that fire. You know what the fuel is? The fuel is the Word of God. It's so important to find the scriptures concerning the situations where you're believing God. And that every day you do that. You're getting it into your spirit. You're meditating on it. You know what you're doing, you're adding fuel to the fire.

The Bible says meditate in God's word day and night. And maybe some of you are believing God to come out of a financial problem. Well you've got to find the scriptures like, "My God supplies all your needs according to his riches in glory." You know what happened? That little pilot light is starting to grow. And it's not going to be long before, if you'll do this, you will be engulfed in this. You will be overcome with your dream, with your desire, and then you'll step out in faith. And when you step out in faith, that's when you're going to see the supernatural power of God begin to work in your own life. But it's when we add fuel to the fire.

You know a couple of years ago I went into a partnership with a group here in town that had a permit to build a full power television station, a commercial television station. And my lead on the project was really to get the thing on the air, was to take it from zero and make it work. And you know there were many, many days where I did not think that there was any way that we could get this station on the air. Many times it was very, very discouraging. Many times I wanted to give up. But you know what I did? I'd learned, of course, from my mom and my dad. When I read the Bible, I wrote down scriptures that concerned favor, that concerned wisdom, that concerned succeeding. And every day I'd get up in the morning and I would read these before I left. And many times when I'd come home, I'd be discouraged and I thought, "Man, I'm going to go back and read those scriptures to build that faith out." Build that faith out because during life you're going to have winds that are going to try to blow your fire out. And that's what was happening to me. And I wrote down some of these scriptures like Proverbs 28:19, "Hard work brings prosperity; playing around brings poverty." I was working hard during those times. Listen to this, Proverbs 2:6, "The Lord grants wisdom; He is their shield protecting and guarding their pathway. He shows how to distinguish right from wrong to make the right decision every time." I was making a lot of decisions, so I was reading over all these scriptures.

And I encourage you, write your dream out. You know we talked about writing the vision. "Without a vision, people perish." Write what you're believing God for out. Put it on a sheet of paper and tuck it in your Bible. And as you read your Bible during the day or as you come to church and there's scriptures that relate to your dream, just write them down. And before long you'll have you a whole pile of scriptures and the devil will never be able to put that flame out of your life, never be able to put it out of your life. (Applause)

Listen to Hebrews 3:6, "Hold fast and firm to the end the confidence we have in Christ." I Corinthians 15:58 says, "Be steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord."

Do you know Jesus knew that it would be easy to give up? I'm convinced He knew. He told several parables about being determined, about never giving up, about holding on to your dream. And you know the Bible is only so big. Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John; the Gospels that record the life of Jesus while He was here on the earth, they're only so big, 20 or 30 chapters, 20 or 30 pages. But it's interesting to me how the Holy Spirit had recorded in there all these things that Jesus told, these stories that Jesus told about never giving up. In Luke 18 it's the story of this widow woman. He said this widow woman went to this judge and this judge was an unjust judge. He neither feared God nor respected man. He wasn't fair. He was an evil judge. And this little widow woman went to him and she said, "Judge, I need some help. Somebody has done me some wrong. Somebody has given me a lot of trouble. I need some legal protection from my opponent. I need you to help me, Judge." But you know what that Judge said? He said, "I'm not going to rule on that. Get out of my courtroom. I don't care about you, lady. You go ahead and get out of here." And you know Jesus went on to tell the story that that lady, that little widow woman, she didn't give up. She was so determined. She was so persistent. She was so insistent. She went back day after day after day and pled her case. Remember Jesus is telling this story.

And finally, that judge got so fed up with this lady coming back. He said no doubt, "Lady, you're going to drive me crazy. I'm going to give you the answer. I'm going to give you the answer you need, not because I want to, not because I like you, not because you're good. I'm going to do it because of your intolerable annoyance," is what one translation says. She never gave up. The Bible talks about a shameless persistence.

How persistent and how insistent, how determined are we going to be? Are we going to stop every time we have one little obstacle? No, we can't do that. We've got to hold fast, take a firm grip.

And do you know after Jesus told that parable, the very next verse He asked a question to all the people there. And I want to ask it to you too. He said, "Am I going to find this kind of persistence and this kind of determination in you?" Jesus asked that audience right there, if you'll read the parable. He looked at them and said are you going to be persistent? Are you going to be persistent? Are you going to be persistent? See how God knew that we were going to have a chance to give up. That's why I'm encouraging you to hold on, don't let anybody or anything tell you that your dream can't come to pass. Don't let anything.

I know some of you say, "Joel, well you don't know my situation. I am overwhelmed with problems. I've got all kinds of things going wrong with me." Well listen; let me give you a scripture. The Bible says when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of God raises up a standard against it. God will see you through.

Some of you say, "Joel, I'm not qualified. I'm not educated. I don't have the right stuff." Listen, God said that He chose the foolish things of this world to confound the world, the foolish things to confound the world. And sometimes you know we say, "Joel, I've lived a bad life. I've cheated. I've lied. I've done a lot wrong, Joel. You're

talking about stuff for good people." No, listen. God's not interested in where you've come from; He's interested in where you're going. (Applause)

Listen to this scripture. You all know it. "Therefore if any man be in Christ..." The key is getting in Christ. "...He will be a new creature. Old things are passed away and behold, all things have become new." We've got to go on with God and forget our failures, forget the past. Hold on to our dreams. I'm convinced sometimes we talk to God about how big our mountains are, about how big our challenges are, about how many things we have to overcome, when we should be really talking to God about how big He is. Talk to our challenges and our mountains and our hardships about how big our God is. You see that's why Jeremiah, I'm sure, he looked up to the heavens and he said, "Ah, Lord God, you've made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arms and nothing is too difficult for Thee." Nothing is too difficult for our God. (Applause)

You know my dad said it many times: it's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog. How determined are you to hold on to God's word.

You know in the book of Matthew Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of God. That very word "seek" implies a strong-minded pursuit. One translation says, "aim at and strive after." Another one says, "to set your heart on." You see what the Holy Spirit was really saying in the original Greek, it's a continual command. Seek and keep on seeking. Never give up. Hang tuff no matter what the circumstances look like.

Listen to this poem I saw. I thought it was kind of interesting. "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are alone important."

You know when I think about determination, I know of no other man that was determined like my dad. My dad was a determined individual. You've got to realize daddy was a funny person. He stood only 5'7" and everywhere we went out in public, people would come up to him and say, "Pastor, you look so much bigger on television." And he would always say, "Dynamite comes in small packages." (Laughter)

But daddy, he wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was raised by cotton farmers. They went through the Depression. Raised on a farm, they lost everything. But at 17, when daddy walked down that isle with Brother Sam, there and gave his life to God, God called him to preach. And he had no formal training, but his very first year, you've heard him tell, he preached 50 times his first year. He knew nothing about the Bible. His family didn't go to church. He tells this story of that time when he preached a whole message on Samson and at the end realized he was calling him Tarzan. (Laughter)

But I think about how, especially since I've had to get up here and speak or I've had the opportunity to speak. You know it's easy for me in a sense because I've been raised in all this. But daddy at 17, he knew nothing about the Bible. But when God called him to preach, he was determined. He made his dream come true. He went and preached on the street corners, in the jails, in the prison. He didn't have a

beautiful church like this to preach in. He didn't have any transportation. He and Sam, they used to hitchhike places to speak. But he was determined to make his dream come true.

And I'm convinced sometimes today, folks, if we don't watch it, we say, "God, we're ready to step out in faith. You roll out the red carpet, God and we'll go." But God's not looking for people that are going to walk down the red carpet; He's looking for people who are going to take a step of determination, take that step of faith. Show Him that you're determined. Show Him that you're determined.

You know I think about my mother who asked me, "Joel, is it hard to speak up there?" And really, I tell her no, it's not hard. It just takes some time. It takes some effort. It takes some energy. It just takes getting up a little early and studying. It takes going over some notes. It takes reading the scripture. But I found the things that are most rewarding in my life are the things that I have to put my heart into, the things I have to put some effort into. Because it's when you put effort into it and time and energy, that's when I found that God shows up on the scene and shows His supernatural power. (Applause)

But you know if we just stay in that little comfort zone, we don't need God's supernatural power. We need to step out and chase our dreams and follow after the things of God.

So many times I think we want God to wave His magic wand and give us a quick fix. But it doesn't work like that, folks. God doesn't have a magic wand; He's looking for people that have some back-bone, that know who they are, that are not afraid to come to church, search His word. People that have some backbone and I think what daddy used to call it is people that have spizzerinctum. Do you remember that? What is spizzerinctum? Spizzerinctum is people that are going to stick to it no matter what happens. You know anybody can complain. Anybody can criticize. Anybody can say, "You know I don't want to go to that church. It's too big." But God's looking for a people that are strong and that are more mature than that. And you know this whole world is watching Lakewood Church right now because in the natural they would, some of them would love to see us give up, would love to see us not be determined. But how I want to encourage you as never before, now's the time to be serious about God. (Applause) Now's the time not to complain. Now's the time not to criticize. You can find something wrong with anything, folks. It's the eyes you're looking at it from. You need to turn your focus back on yourselves.

And so what I'm talking about today is being determined, never letting go of your dreams, holding fast.

You know daddy in his later years and the last year of daddy's life, I don't know if you realize it, but he was in kidney failure. When you're in kidney failure your blood's not being purified and you don't feel real well. But in 35 years I can never remember one time daddy missing a service because he didn't feel well. That's because he was determined. He preached whether he felt good or whether he felt bad. He preached whether he was up or whether he was down, whether he was high or whether he was low; whether it was rainy or sunny. Daddy was determined to go through.

And I think about the last 3 months of his life. Many times I'd go back there in the back and put his microphone on him right before he was going to speak and I'd

known, I'd talked to my mom the morning of the service and I'd known he hadn't slept the night before. And I'd go back there sometimes and he'd look like he was dizzy. He's taken so much medicine. But when I asked him, I said, "Daddy, you sure you're up to preaching. Do you want somebody else to preach?" He would always grin and say, "Joel, I'm strong in the Lord and the power of His might." (Applause)

You see, I want to challenge you in daddy's death to take strength from his death. There's a man that was never going to give up. He always told me, "Joel, I don't want to preach if I can't preach healthy. I don't want to live if I can't live healthy." And God honored his dreams. You may not think so, but daddy could have had a stroke and lived another 5 years in a bed. Daddy never wanted that. Daddy preached 3 weeks before he died. He was up on this pulpit preaching 50 times better than I am right now. He was strong. He preached from the book of Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I still trust Him." Two weeks before he died, daddy was up here giving Brother Osborn a check for \$100,000. What a heart for missions he had--your missions money.

A week before he died, he got to hear me get up here and speak and that's a miracle of miracles, isn't it? But God honored him. Then he went home and he received his abundant entrance into the kingdom of God. How God honored daddy's life. Now he's up there with the saints of old cheering us on. And how I want to encourage you today to be determined, hold fast the confession of your faith, take a firm grip. Some of us need to stop and get a new grip and pull it down because it slipped out of the way a little bit. But we need to pull it down. We need to add the fuel of the Word of God to our dreams. And all of a sudden that little pilot light is just going to overtake us and we're going to be consumed in it and there's where we're going to step out in faith, not only as an individual but as a whole church. And we will take this church to a whole new level. I believe that's what God is calling us to do.

Listen, any old dead fish can swim downstream. God's looking for some people that will go upstream. (Applause)

I want to close reminding you of what Matthew 19:26 says, "Jesus said unto them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" Hold on to your dreams. God will turn those dreams into reality. Let's lift our hands and praise the Lord for His word this morning.

Father, we just thank you. Father, we will never give up. Father, we will never give up. We thank you and praise you, Father. Your promises are yes and amen. I thank you Father, that the people are stirred to step out in faith and do everything you've called them to do. Father, we give you glory. It's an honor to serve you, Father. Thank you and praise you for it.

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS, PART 3"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_HOTYD_003 - 3/21/99
(II Kings 6)**

DODIE: Hello, we welcome you to our telecast today. We're so glad that you've joined us. It's an honor for us here at Lakewood Church to be able to bring this television broadcast to you. And in a few moments our son Joel will be ministering to you. But I want to share a scripture with you. It's in Psalm 33. It's in the Living Bible. It says, "For all God's words are right and everything He does is worthy of our trust."

God's words, His promises are all yea and amen. And we can trust Him because He is worthy of our trust. And all the people said "Amen." And give Jesus a handclap, please. (Applause)

JOEL: I wanted to brag on my mom. Y'all don't have to clap that much. I just wanted to brag on my mother. She has always been the best mother we kids could ever hope for. You know growing up, all my friends used to love to come to my house 'cause momma always fed us anytime they got to our house. I'm telling you, you couldn't come to our house without her making you eat something. (No more.)

Yeah, she's changed in her later years. But, mother she's always been the best mother and we're just so proud of her. And she's just been so strong since daddy's gone on. And we just, we honor her and I just want to tell you how proud us kids are of my mother. (Applause) You can go now. (Applause)

All right, get your Bibles. Let's study our Bibles together today. Y'all ready? Say it like you mean it. Don't get tired on me.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Y'all sound great. I want to talk to you again today on, "Holding On To Your Dreams." I still have that down in my spirit. Holding on to those things God has given you, those God given dreams, desires, those thoughts, those goals that God wants to accomplish in your heart through you and in you.

And you know when I talk about dreams, I'm not talking about something that you dream at night. I'm talking about something that God has placed in all of our hearts. A dream is a desire. It's something that God wants us to do for Him. Some of you it's

to change circumstances. For some of you it's to break habits. Some of you it's to come out of debt. I don't know what it is. A dream is something between you and God. But I want you to know that God is the one that put that dream in your heart and He wants to see it come to pass. But many times over life through the challenges that we face, through the difficult things that we go through, a lot of times it's easy to push those dreams down.

But what I'm challenging you with in these days and especially since daddy has gone on to heaven is to stir up that dream that's within you. Stir up the gift that's within you. The Bible talked about in Philippians to "press on." "Press on to the mark, to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." You see, I'm a firm believer that the dreams and the desires that God has put in our heart they're there because they're a catalyst to get us into God's perfect will. And when we're in God's perfect will, that's when we'll find true happiness and true fulfillment.

So when I'm talking to you today about holding on to your dreams and desires, I'm talking about you getting into that place of fulfillment in your life through Jesus Christ.

But what I want to focus on today folks is that we've got to get our eyes on our supernatural God. We have got to get our eyes away from the present, current circumstances that are around us. Listen folks, if you only look at your situation right now, you're never going to be all God wants you to be.

You remember the story when Jesus walked on the water. He bid Peter to come forth. And Peter came out. And Peter walked on the water because he had his eyes on his supernatural God. But you know the story. The moment he looked down and he started thinking about all these waves and all the winds and he thought, "Man, it's dangerous out here. What am I doing out here?" Well, that's when doubt and unbelief filled his heart and that's when he began to sink. See, it's when we get our eyes on our present circumstances is when we're not going to be all God wants us to be.

You know I was thinking about the scripture that says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith." It was very clear that Jesus wanted us to keep our eyes upon Him. We serve a supernatural God. And you know when you start thinking about your God and you start having a revelation of who God really is, it's easy to see how your dreams can come to pass. Paul prayed in Ephesians 1, verse 19. He prayed that "we might understand how incredibly great God's power is to help those who believe." God has incredibly great power to help you if you will only believe, if you will only put your trust in Him, if you will only put your confidence in Him.

2nd Chronicles 16:9 is one of my favorite scriptures. It says, "The eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the whole earth, looking for people whose hearts are turned toward God." Do you know why He's looking for them? So He can show Himself strong in their behalf. Folks, I'm talking about the most powerful force in the universe. That's the force of our God. He's the One that flung the stars into space. He's the One that spoke the worlds into existence. Think about the power of God's command. When He said "Let there be light," light came at 186,000 miles a second. Isn't that amazing? It didn't just slowly get here. When God commands something, it comes. He's the most powerful force in the universe.

Do you know in the Old Testament, they asked Him what His name was? And He simply said, tell them "I AM that I AM." In other words, there was no way to describe God. He said, I've got so much power. I've got all power. I've got all wisdom. I've got all might. I've got everything that you need. Just tell them I AM that I AM.

And when you think about it folks, what I want you to see today, I want your faith to be inspired that: Yes, we can look at our present circumstances, and we can think that our dreams will never come to pass. Or we can turn our focus up toward God and see this supernatural God and see that He is so powerful; His is so mighty, it's going to make your dreams seem so easy for Him to bring them to pass. The key is to get your eyes off your present circumstances. God will bring it to pass.

There's going to be a time in all of our lives by all natural human reasoning it's not going to look like it could happen. But listen to me folks, you serve a supernatural God. He has supernatural power. And He has supernatural forces at work in your very behalf, if we can only believe, if we can only believe.

There's a story in 2nd Kings, chapter 6, beginning with verse 8. You don't have turn over there. But it's the story of Elisha. Elisha is an example of faith that I really like. I'm really going to enjoy meeting Elisha because Elisha didn't look at the present day circumstances; he kept his eyes upon his God. You see folks, I'm talking about there are forces at work that we can't see. You've got to realize there's a whole other world out there that we can't see with our natural eyes. It's the unseen world. And sometimes if you just start thinking about this life, yeah, I can see why you could think the way you do. Maybe that thing wouldn't come to pass. But God's got power. He's got forces at work in your behalf. The book of 2nd Corinthians says, the things that we see with our physical eyes are temporary; but the things that we see with our spiritual eyes, or the unseen things, which is where it's eternal.

And Elisha in this story--it's kind of an interesting story. In this story, the King of Syria was at war with the people of Israel. And the King of Syria was meeting with his army captains and his commanders. And they were discussing their strategy. They were talking about where they were going to mobilize their camps to hopefully capture the people of God; the people of Israel. And what happened though was every time that King of Syria talked in these private secret meetings, the Spirit of God would tell Elisha over in Israel. And Elisha would in turn tell the King of Israel. And the King of Israel would send out a scout to see if what he was saying was true. And every time it happened--you can read the scripture later--every time that Elisha told him that, it was exactly right. The Spirit of God was giving the secret to Elisha.

And so all of a sudden, the Syrian King he was--after this happened time and time again, he became so upset, he got so angry, he said, "Who's the traitor? Who's spying? Somebody out here is leaking all the secrets." And one of the Syrian army captains spoke up and said, "Oh king, it's none of us. It's the prophet Elisha over in Israel. The very things you tell in our secret meetings the Spirit of God tells him." And the King was, he was furious. The Syrian King said, let's go get him. Let's go get rid of the scoundrel, man. We're never going to catch up with these guys. You know?

And it's funny the Bibles says that the King of Syria sent a whole army out to capture one man full of the Spirit of God. One man! Isn't that amazing? The Bible says he sent a great host out to capture one man full of the Spirit of God. Sometimes, folks, I don't think we realize the power we have through the power of our God.

And anyway, the Syrian troops sneaked up around Elisha's house at night. And Elisha had a servant living with him. And this young servant got up early in the morning and he saw all these troops. And you know I want you to use your imagination because we don't have all the details in the story. And I have a vivid imagination. I don't know if this is the way it happened. But I can kind of imagine just relating my own life experiences. But you know, sometimes when you get up early in the morning. If you get up early in the morning and you're half way awake. And think about this servant. He got up early in the morning and he went outside. And I can just imagine it was a little foggy that day. Maybe the sun was about to come up and he got his cup of coffee and Egg McMuffin and he was walking out. (Laughter) He was walking out to get his newspaper that morning. And I can just imagine him going out there and just half a sleep and looking around and it's kind of foggy, kind of eerie looking. And he looks around and he sees all these chariots and all these horses, all these army people. And I'm sure he did a double take and looked again. And sure enough he was filled with fear. And he ran back inside. And picture him waking up Elisha. He gets Elisha and he shakes him and says, "Elisha get up! We're surrounded by a tremendous army."

And how many of you have ever been awakened out of a deep sleep before? You know it takes you a minute to figure out what's happening. Don't you know? You kind of figure out: Where am I? What's happening? Or all this.

And I'm sure Elisha said, "Son, what are you talking about? You know, are you sure? I'm sure he created some doubt."

You see, I can relate to this because years ago, when Victoria and I were first married. We were married back in 1987, twelve years ago. (Laughter) It seems like it's been a lot longer than that. But anyway, No, no. I'm very happily married. I was happily married. No listen. One Saturday morning, Victoria came and woke me up out of a sound sleep. I had been working hard and I wanted to sleep late. Victoria was going to work at her mom's Jewelry Store. She came and woke me up and she shook me. And she said, "Joel, get up there's a squirrel in our living room." And I said, Victoria; I told her a thousands reasons why there wasn't a squirrel in our living room. I said, "Victoria, the doors are shut; the windows are locked. How could a squirrel get in our living room?" And I talked long enough to where I finally convinced her. I finally brought enough doubt in her life where she said, "You know, let me go back and look again." (Laughter) Has that ever happened to y'all? Well, anyway.

Listen, we lived in a townhouse and our bedroom was on the second story, right at the top of the stairs. And our living room is where she saw the squirrel. And our living room had glass windows that backed up to some woods. And I thought for sure, I said, "Victoria, I'm sure the light is hitting that squirrel just right and he looks like he's inside but he's really outside". Sure enough she went back and looked again. But I heard her feet coming up those stairs 90 miles an hour and I knew we had a problem. (Laughter) She came up and she said, "Joel, there's a table in our living room, then there's a window, and then there's the forest. And on that table there is a squirrel." (Laughter) She made it real clear. And so I said, you know, I thought this is not good news.

But I got up and I was in my pajamas. I didn't even put my contacts on where I can see better far away. So I went down there to look at him and sure enough, I got

about 10 or 15 feet away and there was that squirrel just staring at me. And I thought, "You sorry squirrel on a Saturday waking me up. You're in my house." And I started to turn and I was going to go up and get my contacts on, get dressed, and go find me a net or somehow get him out. And I started to turn around and I noticed he jumped down off that and took a couple steps toward me. (Laughter) And now my heart started beating real fast. I thought I'm not going to talk about you. I said, "Listen squirrel, you're in my house. Stay right there." And sure enough, I thought it was just a coincidence, and I took a couple of steps back and every time I did he was following me.

And at this point I called Victoria. I said, "Victoria, come help me." (Laughter) Listen, but Victoria was nowhere to be found. (Laughter) I thought, "Man, where is she when I need her?" And so I thought, you know, "What am I going to do?" And I could just see I was dealing with a killer squirrel. He was going to follow me. (Laughter) I could see my name on the National Enquirer: "Boy attacked by killer squirrel." And I thought, man what am I going to do. I thought, "I'll do what every other grown man would do in this situation. I'm going to turn and run for my life."

And listen, I'll tell you what happened, I turned and I ran up those stairs 90 miles an hour to my bedroom. My heart was beating so fast. I got in my bedroom and I slammed the door. And I put my head against the door and I said, oh thank you Jesus for getting me here. And God is my witness, that squirrel had beat me into my bedroom. (Laughter) I felt like I was one of those cartoons. You know Jonathan watches Scooby-Doo. When you lock yourself in and you think you're safe and you're in there with the bad guys. I looked down and that squirrel was looking at me, almost like he was grinning saying, "I beat you."

Well, I somehow miraculously got out of that room and I locked him in our bedroom. But in my bedroom were my contacts, my clothes, and the shower. So I was trapped. And here comes Victoria up the stairs and she said, "Did you get him out?" I said, "No, but I got him trapped in our bedroom." She said, "Oh Joel, I could have done that good." I said, "Where were you when I needed you, Victoria?" I said, "I almost got killed by this squirrel." She looked at me and she said, "What are you going to do?" And I looked at her and I said, "No, it's what are we going to do. We got in this together." But long story short, we called her dad and he came over helped us get the squirrel out. (Laughter)

But, the point I was making in a round about way is I was woken up. I created some doubt in Victoria. And I'm sure--Listen, I like what Elisha did. Don't forget now he's surrounded by this army. He's just been woken up very abruptly. He's surrounded by this army. His circumstances looked really bad around him. Man, he is surrounded by problems. But then, I really like Elisha. Elisha had seen God's power in his life before. Elisha had seen Naaman the leper healed of leprosy. Elisha has seen who was it, the widow woman's son raised from the dead. Elisha had this unshakeable confidence in his God that no matter what the situation looked like he served a supernatural God who had supernatural power and who had supernatural forces that were greater than any thing he might face.

And see we all need to develop this unshakable confidence in God. This quiet assurance in God that no matter what happens around us--sure things are going to come--I'm not saying deny the problems. I'm not saying deny any of your

challenges. I'm just saying turn your focus away from down here up to our supernatural God. He's the most powerful force in the universe.

You see Elisha was sure that God would see him through no matter what happened. And Elisha said to the servant, he said, "Son, don't worry. Don't worry at all. I've seen God work. I've seen God work many times." He said, "The armies that be for us are greater than those that be against us." Isn't that a powerful statement? See, Elisha could see into the spirit world. He was acutely aware that this world was not all.

And I'm sure that servant said, "Elisha, you didn't do very well in math did you? You know I count one and one. There are two of us. I saw thousands of them." But Elisha prayed a simple prayer, just a very simple prayer. And it is my prayer for all of us today. He said, "God, open his eyes. Open the young man's eyes that he may see." What was he talking about? Was he talking about his physical eyes? Not at all. He was talking about his spiritual eyes. If could only see the forces around us and how powerful they were, we would never be afraid again.

The Bible says that God opened that young man's eyes and this time he went out and he looked around. But guess what? He didn't just see the Syrian army, this time he saw a vast host of the heavenly armies. He saw chariots of fire. He saw horses of fire. He saw flaming warring angels.

And that's what I want us to get a picture of today, folks. Just what we see with our physical eyes is not all there is. It's not all there is at all. There's a whole other world out there that we can't see.

And this morning during the prayer time, I was watching the prayer partners pray for the people down front. And you know my heart was really moved. I could see the needs of the congregation. I could see the people weeping and pouring out their hearts to God. And I thought God, you know, what do I say to these people? I'm somewhat of a novice up here. What do I tell them? And He said this. He said, Joel you tell them this. He impressed upon me this. He said, You tell them that when they pray in accordance with My word and when they pray in the name of Jesus, they may not see anything in the physical sense. They may not see anything in the natural sense. But the moment they pray. The very moment they pray, things in the spirit world begin to happen. Things begin to happen. (Applause)

When you pray all the hosts of the heavenly armies are on your side. God is on your side. The Bible says in Psalm 56:9 that "the very day we pray, the tide of the battle turns." The Bible says, "God is a friend of ours." He's our helper. He'll be with us in trouble. He will triumph over our enemies. Don't ever forget folks, the power of the devil is real but the power of our God greater.

Just as there are forces fighting against you. Yes that's true. But there are forces fighting in your favor. Jesus said in Luke 10:18 that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. And Satan took a third of the angels with him. But do you realize that left two-thirds of the angels in our favor? They're outnumbered. Satan's already defeated. The war has already been won. We may have to fight some battles. But don't you ever give up. Don't you ever lose hope. God's power is greater in us than he that's in the world.

(Applause) Amen. Give God a handclap. (Applause)

Luke 10:19, Jesus said he "gave us power over all the power of the enemy." What I want us to see today, I want us to know that these forces of God are working in our behalf also.

You know, I remember the story a couple years ago, I saw it on TV. It was about a young lady. This young lady was leaving her college dormitory and was going to her car at night. And as she approached her car, she noticed 40 or 50 feet away there were a couple of people out there, a couple of young men. And she was a born again believer. She kind of felt queasy about going but she'd already committed her way so she just decided to go ahead and go to her car. And felt uneasy. But sure enough these two young men began to approach her. And they got 20 or 30 feet away and she just froze. She said, "I couldn't speak, I couldn't move, I couldn't pray, I couldn't think." She said, "I was just filled with fear."

And you know she said, "Those young men came up and when they got 10 or 15 feet away," she said, "something interesting happened." She said, "All of a sudden they began to slow down and then all of a sudden they stopped." She said, "their eyes got so big." She said, "This terror came over their face." She said, "They looked white like they'd seen a ghost. And they were just filled with fear." And she said, "All of a sudden they began to back up and they ran away." And she thanked the Lord for saving her.

But you know it came out a few days later. One of those men, they interviewed one of those men. He wanted to come out and tell them what he saw. And I'm talking about there are forces for us that we don't even know about. But sure enough one of those young men he talked about, he said, "Yeah, we were going to assault her. We were going to hurt her." But he said, "When we got up close to her, all of a sudden," he called it this warrior appeared. He went on to describe it. He said, "This is like a 9 or 10 foot being". He called it a warrior. And he went on to describe this physique. He said, "It's something you can't even imagine." He talked about his arms rippling with power. He talked about the light that radiated out of his face. He went on and on and talked. Listen, folks, the angels of God, they are not little flimsy beings. They're strong warriors that are here to help us. (Applause)

And I'll never forget what he said. He talked about that angel's sword. He said that young lady was only about, you know, was small. She only came up to about his waist. She was just right there in his lap area. He was standing and he had this sword out. It was about five or six feet long and he had it just ready for action. Just like almost, "I'll dare you to come against her." You see God's power is great. God's got supernatural forces that are working in our behalf if we can just get our eyes off of our own problems. We serve a great big God. And He cares about us. He loves you. He's concerned about you.

You my mother growing up, she used to always pray over us before we went to school. And she used to quote Psalm 91 over us everyday. I can quote it. I've heard her quote it so many times. It talks about if you dwell in the secret place of the Most High you will abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge, my fortress, my God; in Him will I trust. It goes on to say that there shall no evil befall me nor any plague come nigh my dwelling for he shall give his angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways lest we even dash our foot against a stone.

Do you know the Amplified Version says that He will give is angels special charge over you to accompany, to defend, and to preserve your life in all your ways of service and obedience to God. Think about those words: Accompany, defend, and preserve your life.

You know, one time I was leaving the church here. It was a Monday afternoon around six o'clock. I was going to a Monday night football game. I remember it distinctly. And it had been raining real hard that day and it was still sprinkling when I left. And I was driving on 610 right out here before 59. There were some big puddles in the freeway. And I was in the second from the left-hand lane of the freeway. And I went to change lanes and my car lost traction. It just came up when it hit one of those puddles. And I went over and I hit the guardrail. I was going about, I was maybe going 50 miles an hour. The traffic was going slower about that time because of the rain. And I hit that guardrail in the center. And all I could say was, "Jesus, help me." It was happening so fast.

But when I hit it and it propelled me back all the way across the freeway and I spun around a couple of times. And I was just going back across the freeway. And you know at six o'clock on a major loop in Houston, Texas there's a lot of cars. And I remember looking at one point and I looked up and I could see this big truck, an 18-wheeler. And it looked like I could—and I'm not exaggerating. I can exaggerate but I'm not exaggerating now. It looked like I could touch that truck's headlights. I thought immediately, I thought, man, my life is over. This guy's going to run over me. I just, you know you wouldn't think anything. He was as close to me here as to Don, the cameraman.

And I just, I didn't know, I couldn't do anything. I was like that girl. It was happening so fast. But you know miraculously, God spared my life and I ended up on the shoulder. And I'll never forget that big 18-wheeler, the guy that was driving that, he began to back up. And he came back and he came to talk to me. It took him about 10 minutes because he was way down the road. And he wasn't even a believer. I could tell. But he said, "Son, you must be living right." (Applause) He said, "You must be living right." I said, "Why do you say that?" And I knew why he said it 'cuz I saw those headlights. He said, "I was doing everything I could to miss you." And he was so sincere. He said but my rig's loaded. He said, "And I was trying to manipulate it and I couldn't move it out of your way." He said, "But all of a sudden," he said, "I just grabbed the steering wheel and I just closed my eyes because I was ready to plow over you." He said, "But all of a sudden, I hit this pocket of wind that I'd never felt before, this pocket of wind." You know he called it that. He said, "It just blew my truck over one lane. And all of a sudden," he said, "I just missed you." But you know I know that wasn't a pocket of wind, it was an angel of the Lord. (Applause)

That angel of God was defending, protecting, preserving my life. Accompanying my life. And parents you ought to always pray over your kids. God angels they do have charge over us. But let's be aware of them.

Listen folks, one angel in the Old Testament slew a 178,000 of the enemies of God, just one angel. So today I want you to see folks, one of the times God got angry at the people of Israel is when they started doubting God. Doubting his ability. Doubting his power. We have all seen God's power in this church. We have all seen God's power in our lives. How many of you have seen God work in your life? See, it's

time to keep your focus on that. Keep your focus on this supernatural God. God's got power if we can only believe. And God's not impressed when we whine and cry and talk about how bad our circumstances are. No, He's got all this power if we can only believe.

And it is my prayer that we will all turn into people like Elisha that no matter what the circumstances look like. Someday we may even be surrounded by an army, but we can smile and have this confidence that no matter what comes our way, God is going to see us through. He is all-powerful. He can do what man can't do. And it's my prayer today that God will open our eyes and we'll see beyond our natural limitations into God's unlimited, immeasurable, surpassing greatness of power that is there for those who believe.

God, open our eyes that we will see beyond our current day circumstances into Your supernatural power. God, open our eyes that we will see beyond our own inabilities into Your supernatural abilities.

Listen, if God be for us, who can be against us? Who can be against us? (Applause)

And I'm not saying you deny the circumstances, I'm just saying don't spend time dwelling on your circumstances. Spend time dwelling on what a great God we have. Renew your mind in the word of God. Meditate in it day and night. Listen to Numbers 23:19. "Once God started a good thing, will he not bring it to pass?" Listen there's one scripture in Psalms that says, "The Lord laugh at our enemies." He laughs at our enemies. Sometimes I think we should join in with Him and laugh at them too. Psalm 121: "I will lift my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help, my help comes from the Lord." Don't be looking down. Look up. That's where your help comes from. And I pray that we will begin to understand how incredibly great God's power is to help us who believe. Turn your focus toward God. God delights in defying human reasoning and turning your dreams into reality. Hold on. Never let go. God wants to see it come to pass.

Let's lift our hands and just receive God's word this morning. Father, we thank you. We know that there are forces out there that are working in our behalf, Father.

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS, PART 4"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_HOTYD_004 - 3/28/99
(What to Learn in the Dark Hours)**

(Applause)

JOEL: Well, I want to say it's always an honor and a joy for me to be up here. Sometimes I can hardly believe I'm up here, but I'm glad to be here. And I just count it a real joy and an honor for me to be able to share with you.

You know today is a real special day in my family. You know it's a big church and we've got a lot of policies and rules. And one of them is that we can't announce birthday's publicly because there's just so many people and it would take too long. But I wanted to tell you privately just between me and you that it is my beautiful wife Victoria's birthday today. Victoria, come up here. Come up here. (Applause)

I like to show off Victoria. She's so much more beautiful than I deserve, but God has really blessed me. We've been married 12 years. And I would tell you her age but she would kill me. (Laughter) Telling the age of Victoria is just right up there with the unpardonable sin.

But listen, I told y'all how we first met. But I got to tell something on Victoria about our second date. I promise it's not going to take long. But Victoria, we were talking on the phone and we had been out on our first date and she said, "Joel, come over and I'm going to cook you a dinner at my house." And I thought that's great, Victoria. Free food; I'll be there. And so I went over there and she had the beautiful meal prepared. But something interesting happened. All she wanted to talk about was the Bible. It was so strange to me because I was interested in talking about her. And you know to be honest, about me and her together, you know. But she was asking me these scriptures. And I thought you know I didn't have the heart to tell her that I was a preacher's kid. I didn't know anything about the Bible. (Laughter) We're the ones who don't listen in church. She talked to me about this certain scripture and she said, "Will you at least look it up?" And so while she was finishing cooking dinner, I was looking up this scripture. And I couldn't find it anywhere. And I didn't know what to tell her. I finally just told her, you know, "Victoria, I can't find that scripture." And I'll never forget the look on her face. I'll never forget it. She looked at me in such a disappointment and such unbelief. And she shook her head and kind of laughed. And I said, "Well, what? I mean, I don't the whole Bible." And she said, "Well, when I met you I just thought you'd be some kind of spiritual giant." (Laughter) So I told all my friends from now on that Victoria called me a spiritual midget on my second date.

Anyway, Victoria, listen. I want to wish her a happy birthday. She's a great wife, a great mother, a great friend and is that all you told me say? Okay. (Applause)

See I don't even have to buy her a gift when I do that. Y'all ready to study your Bible? All right, let's hold them up and make the devil mad. Let's say it together.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do

what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Open your bibles if you would to the book of Psalms, Chapter 4.

I want to say before I get started that I appreciate all the letters that people have written me and many people have written me letters that watch by television. And I read them. And I want to tell you from the bottom of my heart that I appreciate them. I wish I could respond to every one of them but there's not time. But I do appreciate all your encouragement. Very encouraging people.

Psalm, Chapter 4, we're going to read in just a moment. But let me review for just one minute. I want to continue to talk to you on "Holding On To Your Dreams." How many of you have been blessed in this? (Amen) God's put dreams and desires in every one of us. And I've been challenged in my dad's death, as I've said many times, that we've got to go on further with God and we've got to make our lives count. You see life is short. It won't be long till we'll be up there with daddy cheering other people on. But I've been challenged in that what we do for God we must do now. And God's put dreams and desires in every one of our hearts. And by a dream or desire, I don't mean something that you dream at night. I'm talking about something that God has put into your heart. Maybe you have a dream that God would use you more, maybe that you'd come out of debt. Maybe your dream is to see your family come to know God. I don't know what it is. Dreams are between you and God. They're personal. They're not for everybody. They're just for you. You keep that between you and God.

But what I've been feeling in my spirit is we've got to stir up the gift that's within us. We've got to press on. God put the dream there. He wants us to see it come to pass. But if we don't step out in faith, we could go our whole lifetime and just stay in the same rut that we've been in for many, many years. So stir up that gift.

Psalm 37:4 says: "If you delight yourself in the Lord he will give you the desires of your heart." The Amplified says, "the secret petitions of your heart."

But what I want to focus on today is that even though God's promised us that He'll bring our dreams to pass. Just because He's promised that doesn't mean that we're not going to face struggles and difficulties and challenges in our life. We all know that life is a fight. Paul talked about fighting the good fight of faith. And I would love to tell you that you're never going to have a problem when you give your life to God. But how many of you know it's not true? We're on foreign territory. The devil is the god of this world. He doesn't want any of us to see our dreams fulfilled. But God does.

And there's a scripture in Psalms, Chapter 4, verse 1. Why don't you look at that? I'm just going to read the very first part of it. It says, "Hear," David was talking. He said, "Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness, you have enlarged me when I was in distress."

I want to call your attention to that phrase: "you have enlarged me when I was in distress."

What I want to talk to you about today is how in your difficult times, how in the storms of life, even when things aren't going good. I want to talk about how God can enlarge your dream, how He can enlarge your vision, how He can enlarge your confidence, your strength, your commitment to Him. See, the walk of faith is not a walk, as I said earlier, that doesn't include struggle and difficulty. I wish I could tell you that it did. But it includes adversities that we all have to face. And what I want you to see today is that God will use what you go through to bring you out stronger and greater, with a greater commitment toward Him. He's using that to build your character. I in no means mean that God sends the storm. I don't believe that. But I believe God will take what the enemy sent and He'll turn it around and He'll get some good out of it.

See the storm is no time to blame God and whine and cry and say, "Why God me?" and get bitter. It's no time for that. It's time to get stronger. It's time you know to be more devoted to God, to turn your attention toward God. You see many times, folks, the struggle is what gives us strength. Many times that's the way God has ordained it. I don't think that He sent it but He will use that.

You know this church—most of you know, some of you may not know. This church was born out of a great struggle. It was born out of a terrific struggle in my dad's own personal life. For 19 years, my dad was an ordained Southern Baptist minister. You've heard him tell it. He was Baptist born, Baptist bred, Baptist living and Baptist dead. Remember him telling about it? He was on the Board of the State of Texas for the Baptist denomination. But do you know what happened? God began to enlighten His eyes to the scriptures on healing and the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. And you know, if you're sensitive folks, God will prepare you for a storm. If you really seek God and are sensitive to His voice, you'll realize that God's preparing you for a conflict.

Well, back then in those days, you know it's changed now—but back then in those days, that was very unusual for a Baptist minister to be seeking the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking on healing. But you know, thank God you know daddy's eyes were open. And he was open-minded to that. Because little did he know that a few months after he began seeking that, Lisa, my sister and his daughter, was born with cerebral palsy. What a dark hour in my parents' life! The doctors told my mom and dad, "Pastor, you're going to have to make up your mind you're going to have to take care of a handicapped child all of your life." Lisa was never supposed to be normal. She was supposed to be in a wheelchair all of her life.

You know it was the dark hour. It was my dad's greatest hour of distress. You know daddy could have easily thrown in the towel and said, "God, you know I've served you for 19 years and now you give me a daughter born with cerebral palsy." He could have gotten bitter. He could have said, "God, you know, why can't you find somebody else? My dreams are shattered. I wanted to travel all over the world and

now I've got to stay at home and help my wife take care of this child." What I want you to see it was a dark hour of distress. It was his greatest hour.

But you know what? Thank God daddy didn't get bitter. He didn't get bitter. He turned his focus toward God. You've heard him say, I climbed the hill of God. Wrapped my fingers in the garments of God. See folks, the decisions that we make in trouble are so very important. In the struggles of life what you go through, the decisions that you make are very, very critical.

Don't get bitter. I've seen people get bitter. Man, I'm telling you bitterness will destroy you. Give up that bitterness. Bitterness is a terrible thing. Jesus spoke often about forgiving one another. He said, if you've been offended and you can't forgive your brother, He says, then the Father in heaven can't forgive you. Those are powerful statements aren't they?

So in the time of trouble, don't blame God. Don't whine and don't cry. Turn your attention toward God. Realize that He could be bringing you into a whole new level of ministry.

That's what He was doing with my dad. You see my dad began to preach down there at Hibbard Memorial Baptist Church where he was the Pastor. He began to preach on healing, very unusual. Sister Dearman knows this. These are people that were with us from the very start. But there was a little girl in the congregation. She was 8 or 9 years old, I believe at that time. And her name was Mary Clayton. Mary still comes here. She may be here this morning. But little Mary Clayton, she heard my dad speak on healing. And she went to her house that night and got alone just between her and God. And she said, "Jesus, if you're really real, like Pastor Osteen says, I wish you would heal my foot." See Mary's foot was a clubbed foot. It was never supposed to be normal. Well, she prayed that prayer and she told me herself, she said, "Joel, it's just a miracle. My foot just popped into place. God gave me a miracle." You know it's just like that child-like faith. And it was the first miracle that daddy ever saw. And do you know it was out of that miracle and out of the struggle of the birth of Lisa that daddy was led to leave Hibbard Memorial Baptist and come down here and start Lakewood in an abandoned feed store. Do you realize that in daddy's darkest hour this church was born?

What I want you to see is in your struggle, in your difficulty, don't run away from God. Use your adversity as a stepping stone to get you closer into God. It's such an important point. (Applause)

See, I'll say it again. I don't believe God sends it; but many times the storm can be catalyst to get us off dead center; to get us more where God wants us to be. I've often thought what if Lisa wouldn't have been born? Would we all be here today? I don't know. God's got a way of working everything out. But it was in daddy's darkest hour, it was in the struggle that this church was born; that little Mary Clayton got her miracle.

And then, seven months later after Lisa was born, you know mom and dad prayed over her and nothing happened. But you know what? It doesn't matter what happens immediately; it wasn't instantaneously; over a period of time Lisa received her miracle. And you all know Lisa here today. Some people on television may not know

her and there's nothing I love more than embarrassing my sister. Lisa, stand up! Let everybody see you! Give her a good handclap! (Applause)

My brother Paul, when he was little—my dad used to tell this story and he used to tell—one time he told my dad, he said, "Daddy, God may have healed Lisa; but He healed her mean."

I ran into Brother Nichols in the front lobby the other day. He's one of the original members of Lakewood Church. And he reminded me of this story. One time my mom introduced me to him. And he said I was just about 3 or 4 years old. And he told me this is what I said. I didn't remember it. But he said I looked at him and I said, "Mister, I don't like you." I patted him on the back and I said, "That's funny, brother Nichols, nothing's changed after all these years." (Laughter)

You never know what kids are going to say. My little son, Jonathan, he keeps us laughing. One night about three in the morning, he was probably about two years old. And he let out a blood-curdling scream up there in his bedroom. He sleeps upstairs and we sleep down. And I jumped out of my bed and I ran up there as fast as I could. And his eyes were real big. I knew he'd had a nightmare. I said, "Jonathan, what's wrong?" He said, "Daddy, the Holy Ghost is under my bed." (Laughter)

I thought of Gary and April's little child, Garrison. He's four years old. He's Jonathan's best friend. He's a little jewel, too. And the other day when I left from preaching, I went back there and I knew he was watching on the monitor. And I like to give him a hard time. And I said, "Garrison, how did I do?" And he got a big smile on his face, he's four years old, and he calls me Jo-Jo. He said, "Jo-Jo, you did fabulous." (Applause) I told him, let's go to Toys-R-Us; I'll buy you anything! (Laughter)

But what I want you to see is in your darkest hour, that was daddy's deepest hour of distress, God birthed a miracle. I thought of five major things that happened. Daddy received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in his darkest hour. God led daddy to start Lakewood Church. Little Mary Clayton got healed. Lisa received her miracle. And then also God put in my dad's heart a vision for a worldwide ministry. And he always told me, he said, "Joel I dreamed of preaching to thousands of people but there was no church back there in my denomination that was big enough." So God got him out of that and birthed him into a worldwide ministry that now today we know touches millions of people.

And so, I just want to encourage you today. What's been on my heart is through the struggle—we all go through them—realize that God is taking you maybe to a whole new level in your Christian walk, maybe to a whole new area in your ministry. You see the struggle is no time to cry and blame God. That's the worst thing you can do. Turn your attention toward God. God will use anything that the devil sends and He will get good out of it. The struggle is what gives us strength many times. (Applause)

I've heard my dad tell many times about a little butterfly in a cocoon. One time a mom and her little boy were out in the back yard and they were looking at this little butterfly. And the little butterfly was struggling to get out of this cocoon. It was so hard and it was so difficult for him. And the little boy was just so impatient. Only his head was out. He was trying to get his wings out of the cocoon. But he couldn't seem

to do it. And it was just taking so long. This little boy said, "Mom can't we help it? Can't we make it easy on that butterfly?" See, he didn't realize that that's not the way God had ordained it. And all of us, and I'm the world's worst, is we want a quick fix from God. God, we're in trouble, come zap me with your magic wand. But you know, sometimes it happens like that, maybe when you're a new Christian. But as you go on down the road in our Christian walk, many times God wants to see how mature you are. He wants to take you to a new level. He wants to see if you'll turn your focus completely toward Him. He wants to see if you'll spend a little more time in studying His Word. Will you find His scriptures? Or are you just going to turn around and remain a baby and just cry and pout in the midst of struggle?

See it's not always easy; but it's the struggle that's giving us strength. And finally, that little boy talked his mom into opening up the cocoon. And sure enough she opened it up with a little knife. And sure enough the little butterfly couldn't fly. The little boy didn't realize that God has ordained through the struggle of coming out of the cocoon that the butterfly would push his wings and through that struggle is where he would get his strength. And many times it's the same way with us. If we're going to remain babies all the time, you know, we're going to whine and cry in the midst of problems. If we're going to become strong, we're going to fight life through like daddy said. We're going to fight through each struggle. In our struggles we're going to turn our attention more focused toward God and when we come out of it, God is going to have enlarged our vision, enlarged our dream, enlarged us in our time of distress.

You know David was a tremendous example in the Old Testament. David lived quite an adventurous life. But, I wanted to draw your attention to a story about when he lived in Ziklag. He had gathered around him 600 men that were in debt, discouraged, and discontented. And he molded them into a mighty army. And they made their home in the city of Ziklag. And that's where their wives and families lived. And for several years there he was based out of there and he defended the borders of Israel.

But the Bible gives an account of one certain day they were coming home from a three-day's journey. They'd been gone three days and they were coming home to Ziklag, all the 600 guys. David was only 29 years old. And I can imagine these 600 men coming home—they're thrilled. They've just been through another victory. And they get maybe 10 miles away from Ziklag and they look up over the horizon and they see some black smoke. And you know maybe their mood changes a little bit. Now all of a sudden they're a little solemn. They're wondering "What's happening over there? That looks like it's coming from our city." And as they go on, maybe the pace picks up a little bit. And they get closer and they get 2 or 3 miles away and they realize that that's coming exactly from where their city was, the city of Ziklag. And no doubt the last mile their anxiety turns to panic and they take off running. They take off running to the city. And the Bible gives an account of what they saw. It was a horrible sight. Some raiders, some Amalekites had come in. A band of raiders had come in. And they had destroyed the city. They attacked the city and they had ransacked the city. They had set the city on fire. They kidnapped the women and children. And they had taken all the possessions that they wanted and the rest of the stuff they burned.

It was a dark hour in David's life. Surely, it must have been the darkest hour. His home was burned, his possessions were gone and his family was kidnapped. I mean we've got problems, but I don't think any of us have problems like that. Do we? But

you know it was a dark hour. And the bible says that David and the men wept until they could weep no more. It was certainly the hour of distress. And to make David's problems worse, his 600 men began to talk about him. And they said, David, you know, they began to say amongst themselves, they began to murmur. They said, "Why did David bring us out here? Why did David have us leave our city unprotected? It's David's fault." And the bible says they talked about stoning David. In David's darkest hours now his friends turned against him. The same men that he had molded into a mighty army have turned against him. It was the hour of distress. But the decisions that we make in trouble are so very important. And David's a great one to look at because he had nowhere to go. His family was gone. His parents were gone. All the people he loved were gone. His own friends turned against him. But do you know what the bible says? The bible says that David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

It's so important folks--(Applause) It's so important in the hour of distress, don't bad mouth God. Don't say why God? Why me? No, get rid of that. Encourage yourself if you have nobody else to help you encourage yourself in the Lord your God.

And I don't know that this is what happened. But it could have happened that David - maybe he found his harp somehow. Maybe they didn't destroy his harp. And he went over amidst the ruins in Ziklag, away from everybody else, and he got alone - just between him and God. He had a new commitment to God. He didn't start bad mouthing God. No, you know what I believe he did? I believe he began to sing the praises of God. I believe he began to sing how great and how awesome his God was. I mean, maybe he sang Psalm 34. I heard Gary quote it awhile ago. He might have got his harp and began to sing, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth." He said, "Oh magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord and he heard me and he delivered me from all of my fears." You see the example David set? In the worst time of his life, in his greatest hour of distress, I believe he got alone and began to sing how great his God was. He knew God was going to bring him through. He knew God was going to bring him through with a larger vision, with a greater commitment. He knew the power of his God. You know when it talks about, "I will praise the Lord at all times; I will bless the Lord at all times," it means at all times. Not just the good times. Not just the okay times. It means in the darkest hour of your life. You've got to be able to lift your hands and just praise God. Praise His faith at work. It drives the devil crazy to praise Him in the midst of a storm. It really does. (Applause)

You know he says, "Oh magnify the Lord." Do you know what magnify means? Magnify means "to make bigger or to enlarge in perspective." When you magnify something, you don't change its reality; you change its perception of its reality in your life. So if you magnify your problems, you're not changing how big they are, you're changing your perception of how big they are. When you magnify God, you're not changing how big He is; you're changing how you perceive Him. How much bigger He is in your own life. And it's so important in the storms of life to magnify God and don't magnify your problems.

And you know it's interesting because the Word of the Lord came to David. And He said, "I want you to go attack." In David's darkest hour, he got a Word from the Lord. And it wasn't to, you know, kick back. No, it was to go forward. It was to step out in faith. It was to move on like we've been talking about. Get out of that comfort zone, David. Even though it doesn't look good. Even though everything's dark and

dismal. Even though you're sitting in the ash heap, get out and attack the Amalekites. David got together all those 600 men. No doubt he encouraged them too. And they went out to attack the Amalekites. No doubt some of those men tried to discourage David. They were outnumbered 5 to 1. But David told them, "Look, we're not going in our strength; we're going in the strength of our Almighty God." Don't fight the battles in your strength; take God with you. Go in His strength. God said He would fight the battles for us.

And the bible says they went down there and they fought with a new fervor. They fought with a new determination. And the bible says they wiped out all the Amalekites. They recovered all, the bible says. Not one of them got away. They chased the last one down. This took a couple of days. This battle took a couple of days. And I can imagine the women and children. Don't forget they had been kidnapped. No doubt they're over in some of the huts and they're looking out watching the battle happen. Finally, toward the end somebody gives the signal that they can all come out. Can you imagine the moment it must have been? It was a dark hour for those people too. And no doubt once somebody gave the signal, it's okay, David said it's okay, bring out the women and children. What a joy-filled touching moment that must have been with the women running out hugging the soldiers; with the little kids running out crying out to their dads, thinking they'd never see them again. You see, the bible says, David recovered all. He recovered all.

And what I wanted you to see is he was just sitting in that ash heap. He was just 72 hours away from the greatest victory I believe that he ever saw. Some of you today are sitting in a terrible situation. You're sitting in terrible problems. I want you to know if you keep your faith, keep your faith in God, keep your eyes on Him, you could be right around the corner from your greatest victory that you've ever seen. Right around the corner. (Applause)

I don't believe God will send any storm in your life. I don't believe He sends any storm. But I don't believe He'll let any storm come in your life that He won't use to get something out of.

Listen to this scripture in 1st Peter 1:6 and 7. "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth, though it is tested by fire may be found to the praise and glory and honor of Jesus Christ."

I believe sometimes folks, God is seeing if we're going to go up to that next level in him. Our faith is being tested in the fiery trials that we face. And you know one thing I'd like to say to you is you've got to be willing to change. You've got to be willing to change when you come out of the storm. That's one thing I appreciate about my dad. He was willing to leave his denomination even though he wasn't going to have a covering over him. He was able to leave a beautiful church that he just built to come down here and pastor a feed store. You know there's no doubt people ridiculed him. People still used to ask him what he's doing out here in this part of town. But thank God, daddy was willing to change.

And through the storms of life, don't get in a rut. God may be moving you to another level and you're trying to stay back and hold on here. And He's trying to push you out. And He's doing everything He can. Sometimes you just got to say, "God, I'm

going to take my foot off the bottom of the river and I'm going to go with You." The bible says that God is the potter and we are the clay. We've got to be pliable.

I want you to use your adversities that you face in life, folks, as a stepping stone to get you closer to God. What it all boils down to is we're living on enemy territory. Yes, the devil is after us. He wants us to let go of our dreams. Just because we go through the struggles in life doesn't mean God is not still there, not right there with us. He'll never let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. He will see us through every situation. Many times the storms are a catalyst to get us off dead center, to go on in the things of God.

And you know it's been a dark hour in my life and certainly my family's and all of our lives—losing my dad. I mean, I can't think of a darker hour that I've ever gone through than losing a parent. And certainly you all loved my dad too. But it's different for me. But I've realized that 1.) God will give you strength to bear it, 2.) God will prepare you for the battle. God prepared me. I know He did. God prepared the church. When we look back over it. You know the last year of his life, he preached on "The Year of Maturity." God was preparing us for this conflict. And what I want us to see today is in my own life, God was moving us to another level of ministry. He was moving us to a whole new walk with Him in our Christian walk. And that's what I want us to see as a church. Yes, we're somewhat going through the struggle. We're going through the trial. Certainly the biggest one this church has ever faced. But I believe if we will turn our focus toward God, if we will be serious about God, if we will have a renewed commitment toward God, God will bring this church out with a greater vision, greater commitment. He'll bring us out with a bigger dream than we've ever even dreamed of. The bible says, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard the things God has in store for them that love him."

So I just want to encourage you today, you know, put your trust in God. Don't look at the situation. Don't look at the circumstances. In your hour of distress, don't give up. Don't turn away from God. Run to God. He's going to take you, I believe like, maybe like my dad, He's going to take you to a whole level of ministry. Or maybe like David, your victory is just right around the corner. Hold on to your dreams. God will see them come to pass. Amen. (Applause)

I want to say one quick thing to those of you who are viewing. Many of you maybe don't even know this Jesus that I'm talking about. It's so easy. The bible says that if you would call upon the name of the Lord you could be saved. And I don't want to leave today without making a way that you could know Him. And you know if you give your life to God, make Jesus the Lord of your life, He'll do you nothing but good. It doesn't mean you won't have trials. But He'll do you nothing but good. And all you need to do is simply pray a prayer

Just say oh, God, I know without Jesus I'm lost. Jesus, I want You to come into my heart and be my Lord and be my Savior. I'll live for You all the days of my life, Jesus. You are now my Lord.

I believe you prayed that prayer. Get in a good church. If you're here in Houston, come out and see us here at Lakewood. If not, get in a good church. There are a lot of good churches. Till we see you next week, God bless you! (Applause)

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS, PART 5"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_HOTYD_005 - 4/11/99
(3 things to do in the midst of trouble)**

JOEL: As I say every time, I'm excited about the opportunity to share with you. I'm humbled and I'm awed and I just thank you for coming. I know you didn't come just to hear me. But you come in spite of me. I like to say what daddy said. We had the ushers lock the doors awhile ago, so you're not going anywhere. (Laughter) No, you chose to come to church.

Somebody gave me a little cartoon or cut me out something from the paper and gave it to me the other day. And it was two guys that were fishing in a boat and it was Sunday morning because one of them got a little convicted. And he said to his partner that he was fishing with, he said, "Man, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves being out here fishing on a Sunday morning. We know we should be in church." And the guy he was fishing with said, "You know I don't feel so bad." He said, "My wife is sick. I couldn't gone to church any way today." (Laughter)

I thank God you chose, you made an effort to come to church. We can all make excuses, but I'm ready to study the Word of God. And I thank God you're here. And God sees when we come together and worship Him. And I've got something I want to share with you today. Let's stand up and make our confession first, though. Say it like you mean it now.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) Smile real big. Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

God bless you. You may be seated.

SERMON: Let's open our bibles again if you would to Psalm, chapter 4. We've been talking the last 4 or 5 weeks probably, with the exception of last week, on "Holding on to your dreams." Holding on to the God-given dreams, desires, thoughts, the goals that He has put in your heart. How many of you have some things that you want to accomplish for God? Sure, all of us do. And what I've been challenging you with in these days is to never let go of that dream. God put it there. He's the One that wants to bring it to pass. But it's up to us to step out in faith and to chase our dreams. For it's when we step out in faith, that's when we begin to see the supernatural power of God to begin to be activated in our lives. And so I don't want you to ever think that you know you can't accomplish what God wants you to

accomplish. When I say dreams, I don't mean something that you dream at night. I'm talking about a God-given desire, a God-given goal. All of us have those.

Psalm 37:4, one of my favorite scriptures, "If you delight yourself in the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart," the secret petitions of your heart. God said He would do that. But just because He said that, it doesn't mean that we're not going to have trial and difficulties, and that we're not going to face struggles in this life. I'd like to tell you that the walk of faith was a walk that didn't incur any of those things, but it's not true. All of you know you've got to fight life through. Paul said to fight the good fight of faith.

What I liked about what David said in Psalms, chapter 4—if you don't have the King James, let me just quote it to you. He says this, Psalms, 4:1, he says, "Hear my prayer oh God of my righteousness, for you have enlarged me when I was in distress." God can enlarge our dreams, enlarge our visions, and enlarge our goals in the dark times of our lives. See it's so important to realize that God doesn't send the storms, He's not the author of the storms by any means. But what I want you to see is that God will not waist anything that you go through. He will get some good out of it. He will turn what the devil meant for evil and He will bring you out stronger, with a greater determination, greater in character. God turns what the devil meant for evil and He uses it for good.

So knowing all that, knowing that God, He doesn't send it but He uses it. How important are the decisions that we make in trouble, how important they are. And today God gave me three things that we should do in the midst of trouble, three things. They're very simple; they're very practical. But it is my desire that would give you stuff that would stick to your ribs. I know I could make you shout and jump, and I love to do that. But you know we also need some information that will help us in our day to day life, what's going to help me today. Listen, you know you'll think these are simple, but it's good to hear God's word over and over again. It's the truth that makes us free.

And the first point that I want to talk to you about, in the midst of trouble, when you're going through the struggles of life, you ought to rethink your priorities. What is important in your life? What is taking all of your time, effort and energy? It's really been impressed upon me lately is this fact, it's very simple. But we all have 24 hours in a day. It's what we do in that 24 hours that counts. You know how do we prioritize our life? What part of that 24 hours do we give to God? That's a real important question. See it's not going to happen automatically. You've got to give God part of your life. You've got to say, "God, I'm going to spend time reading Your word. God, I'm going to make time to pray. God, I'm going to come to church." I mean all of you have done that today. Thank God. But our priorities in life are so important. And it's so important that we keep God at the first place in our lives. See God knew there would be things that would try to pull us away and get us away from our personal fellowship with Him.

Hebrews 12:1, a very familiar scripture says, "Let us lay aside the weights and the sins that do so easily beset us." Isn't that interesting? So easily can get us off track. The Amplified versions says, "Let us strip aside and throw off every unnecessary encumbrance or every unnecessary weight that clings to us and that cleaves to us and clings to us and entangles us." See God knew there were going to be things in life. We have to make an effort to keep God first place in our lives.

Something that we all have to do and I say this in the right sense, but you know you've got to watch in life. You can get so busy even doing good things for God. I can preach to myself here. I can be so busy doing a million different things, but the thing that is most important in our lives should be that we keep up our personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I appreciate my parents. They set a tremendous example for us kids. There were six of us in our household. And there was always a lot of activities. I was in sports and the girls were in cheerleading and piano. And there was all kinds of activities, but my parents never used us as an excuse in their walk with the Lord. We knew on Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, and on Wednesday nights the car was loading up and we were heading out to church. We saw them in the pulpit, we saw them preach the same Gospel in the pulpit; well they lived it at home. It wasn't a Sunday morning Christianity; it was a 24-hour a day, 7 day a week Christianity.

And parents, it's so important especially now having kids, you know how your kids imitate you, how your kids copy you. The way you're raising your kids, it's so important that you make them know that God is first place in your life.

See what I was going to say about my parents is they engrained in us how important the things of God were. And every one of us turned out halfway normal. I'd like to say, you know. (Laughter) But I grew up knowing that God was important. I saw my mom and dad reading their bibles. Momma, what are you saying. She's making a comment over there. I wish I had a Mic... But I grew up seeing my parents read their bibles. I knew God was important and that had a tremendous effect on us. So let's take time for God. Make sure God is first place in our lives.

I was going to tell you, it was funny the other day about how kids copy us. I'm a new parent, well, 3 and a half years old. Jonathan is almost 4 years old. But the other day, maybe it was about 6 months ago. I was out in the back yard and I didn't think anybody was watching me. And there's this dog that lives kind of close to me, surround my house. I'm not going to tell you which way. But he always barks and I'm fenced in. But he always barks at me. And that day, I'd had enough loud talking; I'd had enough things going on. It wasn't Victoria; it was other people. I had had enough things going on. And I went out there and that dog started barking at me again. I picked up a rock and I said, "You sorry dog." And I threw that rock at that fence. And I promise you it wasn't an hour, I went out there and I saw my little boy right there close to that fence. And I saw him throwing rocks. And I went over there where he couldn't see me. And I listened real close and he was saying the same thing: "You sorry dog." (Laughter) I thought, boy that will make you watch it. But you know, kids copy you. Kids are watching you and we have to show them that God's first place in our life. That ought to be at the top of our priorities.

And right under that it ought to be our families. God established the family. Parents and people, you ought to take care of the ones that you love. Life's going by so fast. Give flowers. Give roses. Tell people you love them and appreciate them while they're alive. You know it's easy to take people for granted. And usually the ones we take for granted are the ones that we love the most.

I'm a big believer in that we're living in the good old days. Have you ever thought about this? You look back 10 or 20 years and you say, "Man, those were the good

old days." Well, I've got a secret. These are the good old days you're living in right now.

Victoria and I were talking the other day. 13 years ago we were dating and we were kind of reminiscing. She said, "Man, that was when it was you know really fun." We didn't have any responsibilities. We were foot-loose and fancy-free.

But you've got to realize that makes every day of your life count. Tell the people around you that you love them. I know careers are important. I'm not saying your career's not important, but don't let things come between your relationship with God and in between your family. You've all heard the saying on somebody's deathbed, they never say, "I wish could have just worked one more day at the office." You know—have you ever thought about that? They always say, "If I could have spent more time with my family." Well today is the day to think about that. And some of you husbands, I'm wondering if you tell your wife you love her, ever. You know you've got to take time. And I thought today that it would be okay if I just stopped right now. And husband, if you're sitting by your wife, you tell her you love her and you can give her a kiss. It's okay to do this in church. I promise. (Applause)

Listen, how many of you are sitting beside somebody you wish you could kiss? (Laughter) I was thinking about this is the year of Jubilee, we ought to be able to do it. Right? No, no, no, no. (Laughter) I know my mother will kick me out if we do that. Look I saw Lois let Jim kiss her and man, Lois, you're going to have a big reward in heaven. (Laughter) Letting somebody as ugly as Jim kiss her. (Laughter) We men all got much better than we deserve. We ought to treat our wives right.

Listen, point number two—that's rethink your priorities. Point number two, this is probably my most important one. In the time of trouble, in the time of distress examine your attitude. This is so important because it's so easy to get critical, to get negative. When things aren't going your way, it's so easy to find fault with people.

The bible says in Proverbs 30:32, "If you have thought evil then lay your hand upon your mouth." In other words, if you can't say something good, don't say a word. It's not worth it. Don't get that negative talk out there.

What I've realized folks, is it's your attitude is a choice. Most people think they inherited their attitude or that their attitude is a result of their circumstances. Your attitude is a choice. The attitude you choose today and the attitude that I choose, it's a choice. Whether I'm bitter, whether I'm happy, whether I'm friendly or unfriendly, whether I'm sour. Where is the love that overlooks the mistakes of others? Where is the love that overlooks the faults? Where is the love that sees the best in everybody? That gives people the benefit of the doubt? Have you ever thought about that?

You know the bible says in First Corinthians 13—you all know this scripture. It says that—and I'll just paraphrase it for you. "If you have all the gifts of the Spirit," if you're super-spiritual and you give all your money to the poor and you can't love others, the bible says, "You're just a loud clanging cymbal." You know what the Amplified version says? This is some of the strongest words I've ever found in the bible. It says if you give all the gifts to the poor and you have all the gifts of the Spirit and you can't love others, God says, "Then you're a useless nobody." That's straight out of the Amplified version. Those are strong words. God is so—He does not like us to be critical and to find fault. He likes us to have a spirit of love around us.

The Living Bible says, "If you give all your needs to the poor and you're even burned alive for preaching the Gospel and you can't love others, it's of no value whatsoever." Strong words, isn't it?

You know if there's one strength I have, and I have many weaknesses, but if there's one strength I have, I have learned to try to see the best in everybody. I've realized that everybody didn't grow up just like me. Everybody's not going to sound like me. Everybody's going to do a project maybe different than I would do it. They may look different. They may wear their hair differently. But you know what? That doesn't make them wrong, it doesn't make them bad; it just makes them different. You see what I mean? (Applause)

God made us all unique. If He wanted everybody to look like me, He'd made us all robots. And this would be a boring place if we were all just like each other. And you know you've got to realize that He gave us all individual personalities. Just because somebody dresses differently or somebody, you know, maybe goes to a different church or does something a little differently than we do. Colossians 3:11 says, "In this new race, one's nationality, race, education or social standing is unimportant. What really matters is that person has Christ and He is equally available to all." You see—isn't that good? It doesn't matter. (Applause)

And God looks right—all this—you know the first thing we do is human nature, is judge people by how their outward appearance is. And you know many times they can't change that. Daddy use to complain because he was 5 foot 7. But that's something he couldn't change. There's no need to criticize people for that. I can't help it in my family that I'm the best looking one. (Laughter) That's just the way God made me. I can't help it. (Laughter) Listen, April for years has tried to convince my parents that she was the favorite one. And I got to thinking, you know after a few years daddy was starting to favor her as a favor. I got to thinking, well if she's going to be favorite, I'm going to be the best looking one. (Laughter) Listen, people always are telling me, "Joel, you look just like your mom." And I always make a point to tell her that. And I tell her, "Momma, you got a tremendous compliment today." (Laughter) Somebody said I look just like you. You'll know I'm kidding. Sometimes I watch myself on TV and I tell Victoria, "Do I sound and look like that? I sound like a hick up there sometimes." (Laughter) I mean that's the way God made me.

You know this outward appearance is so superficial. (Laughter) Okay. (Laughter) Listen, we ought to see the best in everybody. Sometimes it's interesting. We criticize people for something they can't change. You know that can't change. That's the way God made them. You're criticizing God's creation. You know if you're always negative and if you're always critical and if you're always bitter, you know what? I believe you ought to go in front of a full-length mirror and stand and look because that's where the problem is. That's where the problem is. (Applause)

And I've run into so many people, they think that they're not happy. And they think that if they could just get a new hairstyle, they'd be happy. Or if they'd get a new car or new home or you know if they'd get rid of that lazy, no-good husband of theirs, they'd be happy. But listen folks, that's now where the problem lies. If you're critical, it's going to follow you all through life if you don't watch it. And you know what? The time to break that spirit and break that curse is today. Get rid of it. Relinquish it today and God will help you. You know beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. You see

things as you are, not as they are. And if you're always critical, turn that focus right back on you.

I know daddy use to tell that story about this little grandmother. She would never say anything bad about anybody. And a couple of these guys, that just drove them nuts. They wanted her to say something bad about somebody. And they went up and asked her one day after church, they said, "What about the devil? What do you think about him?" And she thought for a minute and she said, "Well, at least he's always busy." (Laughter) You know you can see good in somebody if you try. I don't care who it is, you can see good.

And you know listen folks, if you're harsh and hard and judgmental, you know what's happening? You're sowing bad seeds. You're sowing real bad seed. This is so true. We think about you know what we're going to reap when we sow in giving and certain things. But listen, it's the same thing in other areas of our life. You're sowing bad seed; you're going to reap bad seed. Today is the day to stop that.

We knew a minister friend years and years ago. And y'all don't know him, so don't try to figure out who he was. But, he was so hard on people that had been divorced. He preached against it. He was so judgmental about it. And we're not for divorce, you know, I'm sorry for people who have to go through divorce. I'm against it but divorce still happens. We've got to be for people. You know you can't unscramble eggs, you've got to go on with your life. But he was so against that. And you know what happened? One day his son went through a very bitter divorce. And it changed his perspective obviously on it. He was much more compassionate. He was much more forgiving. He even apologized from the podium one day.

And I thought about, if we would—I'd be hesitant to criticize anybody until I walked in their shoes. You know we don't know what some people go through in life so you know, there's enough judgment in the world. The bible says to encourage one another daily. You know when I think of judgment, I think of that scripture that says, "Judge yourself." If you're going to judge anybody, turn it back on yourself. There's enough criticism, there's enough of the world throwing rocks; we as brothers and sisters ought to build up each other. (Applause)

Last point I want to talk to you about. In your time of trouble, in your time of distress, when you're going through the dark times of life, learn to turn your situation over to God. Don't fight the battle on your own. God is a mighty helper. Look up to where your help comes from. So many times we try to carry all the load on ourselves. The bible says to cast all your cares upon God for He cares for you. There's a scripture in the Living Bible that says, "Live in vital union with God. Trust Him for each day's problems." Every day trust God. Turn it over to Him every day. Not just all your good points, turn over your insecurities. Turn over your inadequacies. Turn over your fears. Turn it all over to God because, I'll tell you this folks, at your weakest point, that's when God's power shows up and manifests itself in its strongest form. When we think we can't do anything in ourselves, that's when God can step in and say, "Okay, now you'll know it's Me and not you." (Applause)

Listen to what Paul said. II Corinthians 12:9, "My strength and power," or God said it, "My strength and power are made perfect, show themselves most effective in weakness. For when I am weak in human strength, then God makes me strong, able

and powerful in divine strength." At our weakest point is when God's power shows up and manifests itself the most. Turn your situation over to God.

You see that's what really I've had to do in my situation. All of y'all know I've never spoken in public or at least a whole message in 35 years. I always let daddy do the preaching and you know that was fine with me. But when daddy went on to heaven, you know the story. A couple of weeks before he died, he called me on a Monday and said, "Joel, will you speak for me?" And you know I really didn't even want to do it then. And I told him no. And then finally I thought about it and I thought, "I can't disappoint daddy at this stage of his life." You know he was going through some hard times. I thought, "Man, I've just got to get up there and do something." I can get up there and read the book of Psalms if I have to. I'll do something. So I told daddy I would do it. Man, that week from Monday to Sunday, from the time that he asked me, my nerves were shot. That was the worst week of my life, I've got to tell you. Victoria will tell you. She talked to me about some things and I said, "Victoria, look. I don't want to talk about anything until Sunday afternoon at 1:00. (Laughter) I was living for D-day, the day of my...Sunday afternoon at 1:00. I was living for that day. And my nerves were gone. I wasn't practicing what I'm preaching here.

But it's funny what happened though. I spoke that Sunday and I went up to the hospital afterwards and talked to daddy and he was so proud. And the nurses told me, "You did so good, Joel." And you know, I didn't know about all that. But I went in and talked to daddy and he gave me a big hug. He said, "Joel, you're a natural." And I thought, "daddy, you"—I told him this. I said daddy I could have got up there and spoken in Portuguese and you would have been proud. (Laughter) Daddy just wanted me to get up there. But you know it's so funny. I thought, "God, thank you." That Sunday morning, that first day I spoke I got on my knees and I said, "God, thank you not that You'll help me; thank you that this day is going to over before long." (Laughter) I was just interested in getting—you've got to realize how much I wanted to get through with it.

Well, daddy died. I spoke that Sunday and daddy died Saturday morning, Friday night/Saturday morning. And Sunday Lisa was supposed to speak, but she obviously did speak because you know we were all grieving. We were shocked. But I talked to Lisa Sunday afternoon right after daddy died. I said, "You're going to speak next Sunday because she was scheduled to speak that day." And she said, "Joel, I'm grieving. I need some time off." And that was certainly understandable, but knowing that I was reading my bible Monday morning and thinking about the events of the past couple of days, the most dramatic two days of my life. And something inside of me said that I was supposed to speak Sunday. Man, the first thing I thought of, I thought, "Man, I rebuke you devil." (Laughter) I thought, "I'm not going to hear any of that. Get behind me Satan." And I knew where it was from. But that's the way we do sometimes.

And you know I've got to tell you this. I called my mother and you've got to understand about my mother. My mother's very ah... (Laughter) I don't want to get in trouble. I was going to say strange, but I'm not going to say that. My mother's very interesting. On the phone, I don't know if she does this to y'all if y'all have ever talked to her. But when we talk in a conversation, when she's through with the conversation she hangs up. You know, I might not be through, but she's finished. And you know sometimes she'll call me and say, "Joel, you want to go out to eat?" And I'll say, "Yea, that would be great." "Okay, great. I'll be by in a little while."

Click. (Laughter) And I think, "I don't know where we're going. I don't know what to wear. I don't know when. I don't any of the details." That's the way she is. Lisa told me she does that to her too. But listen.

So I called my mother that Monday morning and I said, "Momma, have you got anybody to preach Sunday morning?" And she said, "No, Joel, I'm just kind of praying about it and believing the Lord will lead me to the right person." And I said, "Well, you know I was kind of thinking about speaking." And she said, "Oh Joel! That would be great. Daddy would be so proud. That'd be wonderful. That'd solve our problems. See you later. Bye." Click. (Laughter)

You know and I said, "I'm thinking about. That's means we're going to discuss this," you know? But you know I thought, "Oh that's just my mom. That's no big deal. I can—you know it's my mom. She loves me. She's not going to make me speak if I don't want to." So I didn't say much about it. We came to the memorial service Wednesday. All of y'all were here and she turns around to introduce me and she says, "Here's my son. He's going to speak for us Sunday morning." (Laughter) She told the whole world. I thought, "Oh no."

And I was driving home and I thought—I was still reasoning. I thought, "You know, those are the people of Lakewood. They love me. If I don't speak, it's no big deal." And so I got home that night after church Wednesday night and I was watching the news and it was talking all about the memorial service and about daddy and about how good his life was and how many people he had touched. And I was just about to walk out of the room because the report was going off. And the main anchorman came back on and he said, "And by the way," And that kind of caught my attention. I thought, "Oh no." I went back. I had no idea what it was. And it caught my attention and I went back. And he said, "And by the way, his son Joel will be ministering this Sunday morning." (Laughter) (Applause) I thought, "Oh God, there's no way out of this thing."

But you know what? I learned through that all to cast all my cares upon God. I don't have to do it on my own strength. At my weakest point is when I found God shows up the most powerful way. And I just learned you know—well, I'll put it back on myself. When I'm frustrated and when I'm the most stressed in life, I find that I'm trying to carry too much of the burden. God said His yoke is easy and He burden's light. And it's something we have to do. We have to cast all our cares upon God. It does us no good to carry it all on ourselves. I'd like to know where I'm going the next 30 years and write the path that I'm going to take. But God leads you one step at a time. You've got to follow Him each day. Cast all your cares upon Him.

I know Brother Hagin told a story about a lady that came up to him one time. And she was so burdened, she was so sincere and she said, "Brother Hagin, would you pray for me that God will take these burdens off of me." And as sincere has he could, he said, "Ma'am I could pray for you for 5 years, but it's not going to do you any good. It's something that you have to do. You have to make an effort to cast all your burdens on the Lord."

And see, I don't want any of you to leave out of here today frustrated or I know you go through dark times. I know you go through struggles. But we've got to turn it all back over on to God. He's the one that cares for us. He will see us through any

situation. When we turn it over to Him is when we feel weakest in ourselves, but that's when His power shows up.

One final scripture and I'll quit. II Corinthians 1:8. Listen to this in the Amplified. It's really good. Paul's talking. He said, "I think you ought to know dear brothers, about the hard times we went through in Asia. We were really crushed and overwhelmed and feared we would never live through it." Listen to this carefully. "We felt we were doomed to die and saw how powerless we were to help ourselves, but that was good. For then we could put everything into the hands of God who alone could save us. For He can even raise the dead. And He did help us. He saved us from a terrible death. Yes, and we expect Him to do it again and again and again." Isn't that a good scripture? You notice what Paul said? We felt we were doomed to die and powerless, yet that was good because then God's power could show up.

So I just challenge you today to never let go of your dreams. In your struggles of life, we all go through them, realize that God can enlarge your vision, bring you out stronger, bring you out with a greater determination, bring you out with a bigger vision than you've ever dreamed of. He'll take what the enemy meant for evil and He'll use it for good. So I just challenge you to hold on to your dreams; rethink your priorities; keep God and your family first and foremost; don't have a critical, negative spirit; and then turn that situation over to God. And I promise you this: Jesus said He'd never leave us nor forsake us. He would bring us through every storm, every trial that we ever go through. Y'all agree? (Yes!) Let's give the Lord a handclap. (Applause)

Will you bow your heads in prayer with me and let me just say a quick word to the television audience. Some of you may not know how to—have never made Jesus the Lord of your life. And I just want to give you this opportunity to before I leave.

Living the Christian life is the greatest life you could ever live. It's a fun, fulfilled, joy-fill life. It doesn't mean you're not going to have problems, but God will see you through. I'm just going to invite you to pray a simple prayer with me if you don't know, if you've never made Jesus the Lord and Savior. Just say, Jesus, come into my heart. Save me. I repent of my sins. I repent of the way I've been doing things and I turn my life totally over to you. Jesus, I accept you as my Lord and as my Savior.

Listen, I believe you prayed that prayer and what you ought to do is get in a good church. If you can, come out here to Lakewood. You'll meet some of the most loving, caring people in the world. We'd love to have you. If you can't come here get in a good bible-based church and support that pastor in your giving and in your attendance. You'll never regret giving your life to God. And we're so glad you've tuned in with us and hope you'll be right back here next week.

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS, PART 6"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_HOTYD_006 - 4/18/99
(Don't Limit God)**

DODIE: Praise the Lord. We welcome you today to the television broadcast. We're so glad that you've tuned in. And I have a good scripture. It's in II Corinthians; it's the first chapter and it's Paul talking. And he said, "Jesus Christ the Son of God is not one to say yes when He means no." Thank God. Aren't you glad that all of God's promises are yes and amen? He always does exactly what He says. Do you know anybody else in the world that will do exactly what they say? People will disappoint you sometime. Even the most honest person in the world will sometime disappoint you; but Jesus never will. "He carries out—not only carries them out, but He fulfills all of God's promises no matter how many of them there are. And we have told everyone how faithful He is giving glory to His name." Well we tell everyone here at Lakewood Church how faithful God is, how faithful His Son, Jesus Christ is; and we give glory to His name.

And we thank you for joining us by television. Our son Joel will come and minister to you now. And all the people said Amen. (Amen.)

JOEL: Well as I say often, I'm so excited to have this opportunity. So glad all of y'all are here. And we miss my dad, but God has great plans for us in the future. God knew we were ready. The same Holy Spirit that was in his life is in ours also. So I'm just so proud to see everybody here, thousands of you ready to study God's word. We're just so thrilled. I know God's got great things in stored for us today and for the rest of our lives. Amen? (Amen.) God's a good God. I'm convinced of that, all the time. (All the time)

Let's hold up our bibles and make our confession. Say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess (I boldly confess) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Open your bibles if you would please to the book of Psalms, chapter 78; Psalm 78. We've been talking for the last few weeks, 4 or 5, 6 weeks on "Holding on to Your Dreams," holding on to the God-given dreams, desires, goals, thoughts that He's put into your heart. How many of you have some of those dreams? Hold on to them tightly. I've been challenging you since, especially since daddy died back in January of this year, to never let go, always be pressing forward. Let's always be trying to know God more and more and more.

And God puts dreams and desires into our heart. He's the author of them. He's the one that put them there. So how we ought to know and be convinced that He wants to bring them to pass. After all, He's the one that put them there.

In the book of Psalms, chapter 37, verse 4 it says, "If you delight yourself in the Lord, God would give you the desires of your heart." The Amplified version says, "the secret petitions of your heart."

But just because God says He'd give them to us doesn't mean that we're not going to face obstacles and we're not going to face situations that we have to overcome in life. And what I want to talk to you about a little while today is how we ought not to limit God's power and limit His blessings in our lives. The way we limit God is through doubt and unbelief. There's going to be a time in all of our lives where when we look up it's going to look like by all natural, ordinary, human reasoning that our dreams can't come to pass. Some of you face that right now. It just looks like there's no way in the natural and if you don't watch it, you'll get filled with doubt and unbelief, and you'll stop the flow of God's blessings in your life.

See I like to think of it like this: between me and God and between you and God there's this pipeline. I like to think of it maybe an 8-inch pipeline. And on that pipeline there's some valves on it, some different valves that you can either open or close. And when you start looking at only the present-day situation and you're looking at all the obstacles and the challenges that you to face today, if you don't watch it you'll get filled with doubt and unbelief. And you've just got to reach up there like a faucet. You're reaching up there and you're cutting back the faucet. You're cutting back the flow of God's power in your life.

You see, I wash my car a lot of times out in my driveway and when I start I open the faucet wide open and that water flows forth freely. But when I get another portion I cut the faucet back and I start to restrict the water and it comes less and less and less. And if we don't watch it--God is a good God. He wants to bless us. He wants to give us the desires of our heart. But if we don't watch it, it's through our own doubt and unbelief that we're reaching up there and we're cutting back the flow of God's blessings and His supernatural power in our lives.

You see what I'm getting at? Is that God's a good God. He hasn't changed. He remains the same. It's up to us to believe Him. And if the enemy had his way, he would get us so down and so discouraged and so depressed and overcome by the situation and so talking negative and saying, "I can't do it. There's no way." And all of a sudden we're convinced and we've reached up there and we've totally and completely tightened that valve where nothing from God can come through in our lives.

And what I want to challenge you with today is don't limit God through your doubt and unbelief and go back and open that valve up completely so we can receive the power and the blessings of God in our lives. God gave us the dreams; He wants to bring them to pass.

And I was reading this week in the book of Exodus in chapter 5 and it told all about the Children of Israel when they were in slavery over in Egypt. It was really a pitiful situation. They were so mistreated. They were working night and day. They seemed like they had no way out. But then God began to intervene. And God raised up

Moses. And God spoke to Moses and said, "Go talk to Pharaoh." Pharaoh was the king of the people of Egypt. And He said you tell him to let My people go. Well Moses went and did what God told him. But Pharaoh said, "Who are you, Moses?" He said, "I'm not listening to your God. I don't care who Jehovah God is. Go back and work." And really it made Pharaoh angry and he gave the people of Israel, the slaves, he gave them harder tasks to accomplish. And if you'll read you'll see where he gave them tasks that were so hard it was impossible to accomplish. And when they didn't fulfill their daily quotas, he'd have the Egyptian officers to beat the foremen of the Israeli crews.

And the people of Israel began to complain to Moses. They said, "Moses, ever since you talked to Pharaoh you made it worse." But God gave a word to Moses and the word of the Lord came to Moses and it said, "Listen, you tell the people of Israel that I've seen their affliction; I've seen their sorrow; I've seen their suffering. And I'm going to come down and I'm going to deliver them by my supernatural power and by my outstretched arm." They had a promise from God that God was going to see them through.

And I was thinking about—you know this Bible is full of promises from God. Somebody said there's over 20,000 promises in this Bible. If we would just get them into our heart and get them into our lives, we would see God begin to work and we wouldn't limit God.

But the people of Israel, they were in this terrible circumstance. And God began to send forth these plagues upon the people of Egypt. I don't have time to cover all the plagues but y'all remember some of the plagues. But the interesting thing is all these plagues came and it never touched the people of Israel. Yet they were living in the same land.

One time Moses touched the Nile River and it turned to blood. And another time God sent swarms of insects. One version says, "Maggots and lice and gnats." And it infested the people of Egypt, but it never touched the people of God. There were terrible plagues. But Pharaoh was so stubborn; he was as stubborn as anybody I know today. I mean more stubborn than anybody I know today. He would not let the people go.

So finally God said, Look, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to kill. I'm going to send the angel of death to kill the first born son of every man and animal in Egypt. It was going to be a dark hour. And you can read about this. It's interesting, in the book of Exodus.

And sure enough, God told the people of Israel just to put the blood of a sacrificed lamb over their door post or over their dwelling place, and then when that destroyer, when the angel of death came at night he would pass over the people of Israel. And sure enough it happened just like God said.

And one night, the Bible gives an account, at midnight there was all this wailing and morning. You could imagine what a terrible time it was. The angel of death came down and he wiped out the first born son from Pharaoh's first born son down to the lowliest prisoner in a dungeon first born son. God wiped them all out.

And finally that got Pharaoh's attention. And Pharaoh said, "People of Israel get out of here." And they went on their way and they're going down. And all of a sudden it wasn't too long until they were dead-ended up against the Red Sea. And Pharaoh changed his mind. He said, "What am I crazy for letting these people go?" And the Bible says he got on his chariot and led his army to capture the people of Israel. He still changed his mind. But the people of Israel were backed up dead-ended against the Red Sea.

And you know what happened? Moses stretched forth his rod and the sea opened up. And there the people went through on dry land, another one of God's miracles. And then when the people of Egypt tried to come through, you know the river closed up or the Red Sea closed up and God killed all the army. All the enemies of God were killed.

And what I wanted you to see today is after the people of Israel saw the power of God manifest time after time after time after time, you would think that they would be convinced that God could see them through. You would think they'd be thoroughly convinced. But do you know one of the first things they asked out there when they got through the Red Sea? They asked, "Can God furnish a table before us in the wilderness." Isn't that a pity? God just brought them through all these things and they said, "Can God take care of us now that we're out here in the wilderness? How are we going to get clothes? How are we going to get food?"

And you know what I want us to see today is that God's done something in all of our lives. How many of you believe God has touched your life one time or another? Well you know what? This made God angry when they began to question His might and His power and His ability. In fact, they were limiting God. They said no doubt in modern day Texas English, they said, "Man, what are we going to eat out there, Moses? What are we going to have to eat?"

You know I think from generation to generation human nature doesn't change that much because you know I like to eat a lot. Victoria says, "Joel, all you like to do is eat every time we turn around." How many of you like to eat? All of us do. I can tell by looking at some of you, some of you like to eat more than others. (Laughter) I know some of you are thinking right now, "Joel, the quicker you'd get finished the quicker we'd go eat."

Listen, when I used to travel to India with my dad, I used to find the biggest suitcase I could find. And I would pack as much food in there that I could possibly pack. I like to eat tuna. I would put 30 or 40 cans of tuna in there. I'd take all my bread. I'd take everything I could. And you know it's funny because I carried thousands and thousands of dollars of TV equipment over to India. But the bags that I held on to the tightest was my food bag. (Laughter) I knew if I didn't have that, I was in trouble because I didn't like the Indian food. It was too hot for me.

But one time I was at customs. We landed. My dad and I usually landed about 3 in the morning. And you know the customs officers are not real wide-awake at that time. Anyway so, I had to show them all of my TV equipment, which I did every time. And they'd write down on our passport what equipment that I was bringing in. And they'd decide whether they'd let me in or not. It was sometimes iffy.

So I finally got through all of that. There was a language barrier. And the last bag I put up was my food bag. I thought, "Man, I'm going to get all the hard stuff done now and I'm going to get my food bag out there." Well I got that food bag up there and they couldn't figure out what a can of tuna was. And I tried to explain to them. I said, "It's food." I said, "It's food, man. I'm going to eat it. I'm going to eat it." They were wanting me to write down on my passport that I was going to bring that tuna out. And you know I wasn't going to bring that tuna out, I was going eat it. They kept saying, "Batteries. Batteries for the equipment." And I told them, "Look," You know I had to break down. It broke my heart I had to finally open up a can of tuna and show him. But it was food. But you know food's important to us. And they finally, one of them finally said, "Oh, food." I said, "That's what I've been saying for the last 15 minutes." (Laughter) It was quite a trying time.

You know I thought about that all of us are concerned about our needs. All of us are concerned about what we're going to eat. And I could see some of the Children of Israel; they got out there in the desert. And if it were a modern day language, some of the little kids would say, "Mom, where's the Macdonald's? Surely there's going to be a Whataburger over the next horizon." I can see the ladies. They said you know, "Where's the Randalls? I've got my little Randalls card. Where's my Krogers?" You know, "Where's the Walgreen's, God? I've got to buy my husband some deodorant, God, out here in the desert." (Laughter) They could have thought of all these things.

You know those people; they began to question God. They began to question His power, His might and ability. "Can God bring us through?" And God was not pleased. And in Psalm 78:40, it's an interesting scripture. Look what it says. It says—78:40—it says, "How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness and grieve Him in the desert. Yea, they turned their backs and tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel." How did they limit Him? By their doubt and unbelief. You know the Living Bible says that, "they limited God from giving them His blessings. They forgot His power and love and how He had rescued them from their enemies." They limited God from their blessings. In other words, they stopped the flow of God's power. They turned back the valve a little bit because of their doubt and unbelief.

And I want you today to be challenged and to be encouraged. I look back over my life and I can't help but know that God has intervened in my life. God has done so much for all of us. I think about Lisa. When she was born with a birth injury, something like Cerebral Palsy. But yet God healed her. God healed my mother in 1981 of cancer of the liver. I've got something to praise God about. I've got some victories to look back on. God's given me a beautiful wife and beautiful children. He's given me a sharp mind and the air that I breathe and the arms that I use. God's done so much for us. I am not going to doubt Him. I'm not going to limit Him in my life through doubt and unbelief as to whether He can take me through the next situation, as to whether He can make my dreams come true. I know He can. He's done so much in my life.

And you in turn, how many of you—I asked you earlier. But how many of you distinctly know God's touched your life at one time or another? See, every one of us. Let's don't displease God like the people of Israel did. They angered God. They limited God. No doubt, even those of you watching, you may not even be born again, but you know there's a time in your life that God has touched your life. He's answered a prayer. You can't deny the power of God. We all can't. And what we do is

when we get into doubt and unbelief, we start to limit God. God's got all the power in the world, but if we're not open then we stop His flow.

And one of the easiest ways to stop the power of God is through our natural mind, our natural mind. Your human reasoning, you're going to look around one day or another and you're going to think, "My dreams can't come to pass. There's too much against me, too many challenges."

Romans 8:7 says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." What does that mean? That means your mind in the natural state is going to tell you all the reasons your dream can't come to pass. Your mind will tell you from a logical, natural, ordinary prospective. It will surmise the situation and it will feed you back information. And most of the time it will do it from a totally ordinary point of view and it will fill you with doubt and unbelief. And before you know it, you're discouraged and you're depressed and you're thinking you cannot accomplish the things that God wants you to. But listen, that's why the Bible is so clear in Romans 12 to renew your mind. The battlefield is in the mind. And it's so important that faith rises up in our heart and we not limit God by our natural, narrow-minded thinking.

You know what the Bible says in Isaiah 55. It says that, "God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. As the heavens are high above the earth, so are God's ways and thoughts high above ours."

And you know I thought it's interesting the analogy that God used: as the heavens are high above the earth. Think of the great distance that He's talking about. That's a tremendous distance. He could have said as the ground is to the clouds. But no, He used a tremendous analogy there so that we would know His thoughts are so much better.

And there's so many times in our life, and I'm guilty of doing it too, that we try to tell God exactly how to fix our situation. We say, "God, I'm in this problem and here's how you fix it, God." You know what we're doing? We're limiting God. I want you to get that out of you today and to not limit God in any area of your life.

I'm talking about thinking just in one line of thinking. So many times--we think naturally; God thinks supernaturally. We think ordinarily; God thinks extraordinarily. God created the whole world; He can do anything.

Take a look at this. I'm talking about trying not to just limit God with our natural thinking. These are Roman numerals. They use letters of the alphabet to represent numbers. The letter "I" equals a one. The letter "V" equals a five. The letter "X" equals a ten. And when you put Roman numerals together it's a little different than our numbers; you add them together. So here we have "V, I, I". We have a five, plus a one, plus a one; it equals seven. I know most of y'all know this. I just want to go over it. But--maybe you don't know it. I don't know. (Laughter)

The Roman numeral "V" equals a five. But when you put a smaller number in front of a larger Roman numeral, you subtract it. So there's a five, but it's got a one in front of it so it equals a four. The other day we had the super bowl, a couple of months ago: XXX...Super Bowl 33: ten, twenty, thirty, thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three.

Well here's what I want you to do. And I hope you can get this. And if you know the answer, please don't tell. Listen, I've got down here. I've got an "X"; it equals ten. And I've got an "I"; it's one. But the smaller number is in front of the larger number so we subtract it. So it's "X", ten minus one equals nine. I want to see if by one stroke of the pen if you can get that to six. I'm trying to get that to six. So look at it. Now you can't come up here and add three "I"s and go you know, eight, seven, six. You can only use one stroke of the pen. Think about it just a minute. It can be done. Is there any way we can make that? Anybody know? Don't tell me. Oh, one guy knows. He's seen it before. Okay listen, watch what I do here. Is there any way with one stroke of the pen we can't—if we take that "V" it's going to take it down to four because—Look here's what I'm going to do. I hope you can see this. I'm going to add the letter "S". (Laughter) You see what I mean.

You know what happened? I hope what happened. I think I did. I got you thinking down the track of Roman numerals, Roman numerals, Roman numerals. We were thinking one line of thinking and it's the same thing with God. So many times we say, "God, I want to get out of debt." We say, "God, if You just give me that 3% raise, in 22 years, God, I'll pay off my house note. And God, in 45 years I'll pay off my credit cards. And God, in 55 years I'll pay off my wife's clothing bills." (Laughter) Then we look up and say, "God, by the time I'm 122, I'll be ready to be used mightily of You. (Laughter) You know God's not like that. God's a supernatural God. We think naturally; He thinks supernaturally. Let's not limit God by our natural, carnal thinking.

You know some of you are believing God that your kids or your loved ones will come to know God. And you think, "Oh God, if can just get them to church and get them up there on the third row. And when Brother Gary is singing one of those power songs, God you hit them with a Holy Ghost lightening bolt, God." (Laughter) And you say, "God, let's project them up in the air and they'll turn seven summer-saws and land right there." And say, "God, you know then they'll be changed." But yet, you know that's one way, but God's got a thousand other ways. God can cause conviction. God can cause somebody to come across your child's path. I could stand up here and tell you story after story of how God supernaturally touched people's lives and they weren't even in the church. God's a supernatural God. We can't limit Him by our natural thinking.

And we knew--years ago my parents knew a man named Casey Jones. Y'all might have heard my dad tell this story. But it was really good because Casey didn't limit God to the natural limitations of this world. He'd believe God for anything. I want to challenge you to have faith in your heart. God can do anything. He's a great big God. Let's keep the valve wide open.

Well, Casey by trade was a house-mover. He moved these big houses from location to location, kind of like the things you see going down the highway sometime. And he gives the account: one day he had driven two or three hours out into the country with this house that he was moving. And he got out there and they were about to unload it. And it was kind of getting late in the day. And they got out and he realized he had forgotten his chain. He needed a chain to finish the project. And he was so disappointed because he had traveled all this way and the nearest town was like an hour away. And the guys that were with him, they began to unhook the tractor trailer truck from the house because they were going to shoot back to the next town. But Casey said, "Don't do that because by the time you get to the next town and

back that's two hours and it will be dark." And he was just disappointed and he said you know, "God, what am I going to do? I can't leave this house out here. There's no way. I need a chain."

And so those guys, he told those guys to quit unhooking the rig from the house. And he said, "I want to pray." And they kind of made fun of him a little bit. They said, "What do you mean? You want to pray?" He said, "Well, I'm going to pray and ask God to give me a chain out here in the middle of a country road." And they laughed and they said, "Casey, are you crazy? What's going to happen? Is God going to rain down a chain from heaven? Is He going to grow a chain from the earth? What do you mean, Casey?"

You know what? The Bible says you have not because you ask not. I'd rather trust God and believe you know. (Applause)

You know what? He got alone by himself and he just went over the side of the road. And he just said, "God, I'm so disappointed. I know, God, You don't want me to lose a whole day's worth of work and have to go park this house somewhere and come back tomorrow. And God, it's getting dark. We don't have time to go back." And he said, "God, it's my fault. I'm the one that forgot the chain." But he said, "God, I know You can do anything. You're a God that can make a way where there is no way." He just had confidence in God. And he said, "God, just somehow. I don't know how, but give me a chain." And those other guys were still snickering a little bit.

But they standing on the side of the road on a curve. And before long this beat-up pick up truck came barreling down the road going way too fast. And in the back of that pick up truck the tailgate was open. And there were some items in the back of the pick up truck. Guess what was back there? There was a chain. And it went up around—I believe it was some kids—and they went up around that curve way too fast. And the force just thrust that chain out and it slid right across the road and it slid right up to his feet. Isn't that great? (Applause)

God's a supernatural God. He picked it up and said, "Here's my chain boys; let's go to work." You know God can do anything.

And I want you to get your eyes off your present day circumstances and get your eyes upon your supernatural God. Let's keep the flow of God's blessings open in our lives. Some of you today, you say, "Joel, you don't know my situation." Well look, you're situation couldn't be much more odd than that one. God can see you through. God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts.

In Second Chronicles, chapter 20—I'll close with this one story. There's a story of Jehoshaphat was in a real bind himself. He had—the Bible gives the account where there were 3 armies coming against Jehoshaphat and his little band of people. I don't even think it was an army. Three great armies: the armies of Ammon, of Mt. Seir and of Moab were all coming against him.

And Jehoshaphat, he didn't know what to do. And what he did—I like what he did do though. He didn't start looking at the present day circumstances. The Bible indicates that he got the people, all of his people out into the fields. And they looked up toward God from whence their help comes. And the Bible says he prayed like this, he

said, "God, we have no power or might or ability in ourselves. We know not what to do, but our eyes and our trust is upon You." That's a good prayer to pray.

Sometimes we all get in situations in our lives where we can't do anything more. We say we don't know what to do. But we just need to say, "God, our eyes are upon You." And the Bible says that the Spirit of God—thank God for the Holy Spirit. Thank God for the Holy Spirit. Thank God for Holy Ghost power. The Spirit of God came upon Jahaziel and he began to prophesy. Jahaziel was one of Jehoshaphat's men. And he began to prophesy and the word of the Lord came to him saying, "Don't be afraid. Don't be fearful. This battle's not yours. You're not going to have to lift a finger." God said, "I'm going fight the battle for you." He said to stand still and see the delivering power of God.

And do you know what happened? God works in mysterious ways. God instructed that little band of people to march toward the other 3 armies that were going to come against them, very unusual. Surely they would sneak up on them at night; but no, God said go right in the daytime. And not only so, He said, "Put the singers and the praisers out in front and have them praising God as we march toward them." See that's very unusual to put the choir in front of the army men, very unusual. Sometimes we don't know why God's telling us, but we've got to realize His ways are higher than our ways; His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

And the Bible says as they marched toward those 3 armies-- the Bible gives an account of what they said. Every step they said, "The Lord is good and His mercy endures forever." The Lord is good and His mercy endures forever. And they marched—and I can imagine as they got closer, they got louder, they got more filled with faith. And I can imagine by the time they got closer they were screaming to the top of their lungs: "The Lord is good and His mercy endures forever."

And you know the Bible tells us what happened. It says that those 3 armies got fearful. They got afraid. They got confused. And you know what God caused them to do? He caused them to fight between themselves. And all of a sudden those 3 armies fought between themselves and destroyed every one of the 3 armies. And if they didn't destroy it, the others ran away in fear. And by the time Jehoshaphat's army walked up to the camp where they were, they were all either dead or gone. And they just picked up the spoils and God gave them a tremendous victory.

Listen, God's done it for him. He's done it in my life. He can do it again. God can do it again. (Applause)

Today I just want your faith to be inspired. Don't think your dream can't come to pass. God's a supernatural God. Don't limit Him by just one line of thinking. You can step over into a whole other line of thinking. God's a supernatural God and if we just trust Him and believe in Him, He will bring our dreams to pass. Let's not limit Him. The Bible says in Matthew 19:26, "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God." God can see you through any situation. He delights in defying human reasoning and bringing your dreams to reality.

Let's lift our hands and just praise God for His supernatural power. God, we thank You. Our eyes are upon You, Father. We will not limit You, God. We know there's nothing too hard for You, Father God. We praise You and we thank You for Your promises in Your word. Thank you for it, Father God.

Let me just say something. If you'll bow your heads in prayer, let me just say something to those of you who are viewing by television. Maybe some of you have never asked Jesus into your heart. You know it's not a difficult thing to do. You just have to pray a prayer and mean it from the bottom of your heart. Be sincere.

Just say, Jesus, come in to my heart and save me. Be my Lord; be my Savior. Jesus, I repent of my sins and I turn my life over to You. You are now my Lord and my Savior and I'll serve You all the days of my life.

Well I trust you prayed that prayer. And I encourage you every week to get in a good church. If you can, come out here to Lakewood. We would love to have you. If you can't come here, go to another good church in your area. There are plenty of good churches and be supportive there. You'll never regret giving your life to God. I sure hope you'll join us again at this same time next week. God bless you.

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS, PART 7"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON # SER_HOTYD_007 - 4/25/99
(The Voice of Discouragement)**

DODIE: We welcome you to our telecast today. And I want to share this scripture with you. It's in the last chapter in the book of Ecclesiastes written by Solomon of Jerusalem, King David's son, the Preacher. And here's what he said, the next to the last verse, he said, "Here is my final conclusion..." After he wrote all these chapters. He said, "Fear God and obey His commandments, for this is the entire duty of man." It's as simple as that. Fear God and obey Him because that's our duty. We're His children and that's what we need to do as our duty. A lot of things in life we do because it's our duty. But the main thing is we need to fear God and obey His commandments because that's our duty as children. Aren't you glad about that? Would you give Jesus a handclap? (Applause)

And now my little boy, Joel, our youngest son is going to be preaching you a good message. And I know you appreciate the fact that he's just trying his best and he's doing a good job. (Applause)

JOEL: I want to tell you something kind of funny. I went to the National Association of Broadcasters Convention this week in Las Vegas and I ran into several people that knew us. And one night Victoria and I were at the mall. If that surprises anybody: Victoria at a mall? (Laughter) The first thing Victoria does when she goes to a new city is she strategically maps out all the locations of the mall. Yea, smart girl she said. But we were at the mall one night. And I've learned to—you know I usually just sit on a bench and let Victoria do all the shopping. I can't keep up with her. I'm fast, but not that fast. But I was sitting on this bench and this particular lady came up to me and she looked at me kind of strangely a couple of times. And I thought—you know I was about ready to move because she made me feel a little strange staring at me. I thought she was a nut. But anyway came up to me in a little while and she said, "Are you that young man that comes on TV from that big church on Sunday nights?" And I said, "Yes, I am." She said, "Well, I've been wanting to tell you something." I thought, I wonder what this could be? I could tell she was going to have an opinion. She looked at me and she pointed her finger and she said, "Listen, you treat your mother right." (Applause) I thought, Man, I don't have a chance if people from other cities are standing up for my mother.

But it's funny in Las Vegas—I don't know if y'all have ever been but I had the opportunity like I said to take my family and my little 4 year old son, Jonathan. Everywhere you look there's slot machines. And of course, he thought they were video games. And you know we play video games sometimes at the mall like race cars and stuff like that. But he couldn't understand why he couldn't play them. You know there are slot machines at the airport, in the hotels, in the restaurants, y'all know, in the elevators, in the restrooms; anywhere they can put them. They put one there. And he said, "Daddy, can I play some of these?" And I said, "No, Jonathan," I said, "What those are, those are games people put their money in and they try to win more money back, but most of the time they never even get their money back." And I was trying to explain it. He looked at me kind of puzzled and he said, "It sounds just like the game we have at home. I never get my money back either." (Laughter) I thought, I'll try to do better explaining that next time. For now, we just don't play them.

But I was thinking about when I was there, I was thinking about how funny my dad use to be. When the Texas Lottery started, people use to write him questions up here and ask him, "Is it okay to play the lottery?" And you daddy. He'd always try to discourage it. "Don't waste your money like that. Be frugal and take care of what God gives you." But he'd always add that little last line at the end. Most of y'all know what it is. He said, "However, if you do play and win, be sure you tithe." (Laughter) (Applause)

Anyway, it's good to have you here in church. It's good to have fun in church and learn God's word. And I'm excited today about having the opportunity to share with you as I do every week.

Let's hold up our bibles. Let's make our confession.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. I'm not going to have you turn anywhere in particular right now. I'm going to quote quite a few scriptures. Maybe you can write them down. But we've been talking for the last 6 weeks or so on holding on to your dreams, never letting go of the God-given dreams and desires, thoughts and goals that He's put into your heart. You see I'm a firm believer that God plants the dream in our heart. He gives us desires. I don't know what they are. The desire, the dream is between you and God. All of you have it. And I've been challenging you in these last couple of months or especially since my dad's died, to reach out and go further in the things of God. We need to all get out of our comfort zone if we really want to see God's power work. We need to go further in the things of God.

And the scripture that I've quoted every Sunday is Psalm 37:4, "If you delight yourself in the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart." What a tremendous scripture. And we've talked about all the different aspects of holding on to your dreams from being determined to not looking at your circumstances, to not limiting God like we did last week. But today I want to talk to you about another simple truth. And this is how not to listen to the voice of discouragement in your life, how not to listen to the voice of discouragement.

You see all of us in life are going to have the opportunity, as we fight the good fight of faith, as we struggle through life. We're going to all have the opportunity to listen to these negative forces and negative voices that come against us and tell us that we can't succeed, that our dream won't come to pass, so on and so forth. The trick of the enemy is to try to get us to throw in the towel and say, "You know that dream wasn't for me anyway." And the enemy just wants us to live a mediocre, average

life, when we know God has called us to excellence. God's called us to do great things for Him. And it's a powerful tool of the enemy, the voice of discouragement. By that I mean, I'm not talking about when you're discouraged, I'm talking about when people say discouraging things to you at a critical time in your life and it brings fear and anxiety and stops you from launch out for God. Sometimes the enemy can have you read something in a publication and all of a sudden it just stops you in your track and you don't want to go any further with God. It brings fear. And we all know that the devil himself can put thoughts and words into our own mind to try to keep us from being all God wants us to be. It's the voice of discouragement. And Satan knows if he can keep us in doubt and he can keep us in unbelief and he can keep us discouraged, then we'll never be all God wants us to be. We'll never amount to all God wants us to be.

You see words are so powerful in our lives. Words can either build you up or they can tear you down. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." And negative words especially. They're like seeds in our spirit. You have a choice: you can either listen to them, you can either dwell on them and by doing that you'll water them and they'll grow and you'll become what they say. Or you have a choice to cast them down and to not listen to them and go on in the things of God.

And some of you today, I dare say you've had somebody say something negative to you or the enemy's put a thought in your mind and it's held you back for years and years and years. And I want us today to examine our lives and not let the enemy steal from us just from his lousy voice, these lousy voices of discouragement.

You see God knew how powerful negative talk was. When He instructed Joshua and the children of Israel to march around the walls of Jericho for 7 times, you know it's no coincidence that He told them—He gave them a strong command. He said don't open your—don't let one word come out of your mouth. Don't let your voice be heard. God knew what would happen. He knew human nature, that as they marched around the walls of Jericho, they'd start to look at the circumstances. They'd start to look at how big the walls were. They'd start to look at how big the stones were. And before long they'd be voicing that negative opinion. They'd be saying, "These walls aren't going to fall down. There's no way. Look at us. We look foolish out here walking around."

You know what happens with negative talk? It spreads like wild fire through the ranks. It spreads like wild fire. And it begins to infect everybody else around you. That's why God said, Don't even open your mouth when you're out there marching around those walls.

And I was thinking about a couple of different places where Jesus—Jesus had to face the voice of discouragement. At one time Satan himself came to Jesus. And Jesus had been in the wilderness fasting for 40 days. And Satan came to Him and 2 or the 3 temptations. You remember how he started it? He said, "If you be the Son of God." You hear that doubt? You hear that possible discouragement? Jesus, are you even the Son of God? If you are cause these stones to be turned into bread. And remember how Jesus answered? It's a powerful principle. He answered with the Word of God. He was the Son of God. He could have said anything. But He went back to the Word of God. He said, "Satan, it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone."

And the principle I want you to see: we need to use Jesus as an example. He answered the voice of discouragement with the Word of God. There's no need to put our thoughts on it; let's put God's thoughts on it.

You know it seems like all my messages come back to this simple truth that the promises in this Bible, we need to get into our heart. This Bible won't do you any good sitting on a coffee table. It's not a book just of good history; it's not a book moral lessons. No, the Bible says that this Word is alive and powerful, and it's active in the heart. You know it will only do you good if you get it into your heart. And there's no better way to refute the voice of discouragement than with the written Word of God, than with the Word of God. You know it's not for lazy people. It's something that you have to do. Thank God y'all are all here this morning, but you know the Bible says to study to show yourselves approved. It's something that we all have to do. You know it's not hard. It's just something that we have to do. We have to make an effort. We have to put on the whole armor of God. God responds to hunger. James 4:4 says, "If you draw nigh to God, He'll draw nigh to you." The way to refute the voice of discouragement is with the Word of God.

And there's another place in the scripture, in Mark, chapter 5 where Jesus encountered the voice of discouragement from other people. Very interesting story. Jesus was walking through a certain village and there were all these people around Him. But a leader of the Jewish synagogue came up to Him and fell down before His face. And no doubt he had big tears running down his eyes. You know if you have kids. He said, "Jesus, my little daughter." His name was Jairus. He said, "My little daughter is at the point of death. She's almost dead, Jesus. Will you please come and help her?" Can you imagine how he must have begged Jesus? "Please Jesus, will You come take time out of your busy schedule and come to my house?" And you know what Jesus said? There's instances in the Bible where Jesus, He was moved with compassion for the people. He had pity for the people. He wanted to heal them. He said no doubt, "Jairus, yea I'll go to your house. I'll go right now. Let's go Jairus." See that's the kind of God we serve. Don't let people make Jesus into something that He's not. He is ready and willing to touch all of your lives. Amen. (Applause)

And you know the Bible says—it's an interesting point here. The Bible says as they went toward Jairus' house, hand in hand walking right beside Jairus. The Bible says that there were so many people around Jesus, the throngs of people. One version says they almost suffocated Him. So you can imagine how hard it was for Jesus to get to that house. And you can imagine the apprehension in Jairus. It's almost like, "Jesus, hurry. We've got to go." But it was at this point that the lady with the issue of blood that we've all read about, reached out and touched the hem of His garment. And Jesus was dealing with her. That stopped Jesus right there in His tracks. And I can imagine Jairus being so uptight and not wanting to bother Jesus.

But then all of a sudden here's what happened. Some people came through the crowd. I can see them pushing through the crowd. Jesus is now dealing with the woman with the issue of blood. Jairus is right next to Him. They're pushing through the crowd and they're trying to get through saying, "Excuse me. Excuse me. I got to get up there." And you can imagine how they had to fight to get through. And they came up to Jairus and they said, "Jairus, I have terrible news for you. I have terrible news for you. We hate to tell you this, but your little girl just died. There's no need to bother Jesus any more. Let Him stay here and help these other people."

Well you know, interesting thing that happened there. The Amplified Version says that Jesus heard the negative report. He overheard it; but He ignored it." Jesus—read it some time. It says Jesus overhearing the voice of discouragement, but ignoring it. Jesus knew He was the Son of God. He wasn't going to let that voice of discouragement stop Him from doing what He's going to do. See that's a powerful point in our lives. Because throughout life we're going to all hear the voice of discouragement. We have a choice. We can either believe it or not believe it. We can ignore it and put God's word in our heart.

You see the scripture ought to come up out of your heart when somebody says something to you that goes against what you know, goes against your dream, goes against God's promise. Somebody says maybe something to you like, "You're never going to get out of debt." That scripture needs to rise up out of you: "My God's going to supply all my needs, you know, according to His riches in glory." (Applause)

See I'm not at all saying ignore the circumstances, I'm saying ignore the negative talk. People are always going to try to bring you down. Somebody's going to tell you, "You're never going to get out of that situation. It doesn't look good." You don't have to be rude to them. But that scripture can just rise up in you. "My God always causes me to triumph." You can hear it; but you can ignore it. God's word is the truth that's going to stand the test of time.

And you know since daddy's died, I've had plenty of—well let me tell you this. Jesus went on and He healed that little girl and made her totally well. He didn't listen to the voice of discouragement. Jairus got his miracle.

But I was going to say that ever since daddy's died, I've had plenty of voices of discouragement come to my life. Not from people. Most people encourage me. But it's usually from the enemy. The enemy, Satan himself can put thoughts into your mind. And I'm not even going to tell you some of them that he's told me. They're too funny. But one thing he tells me ever Sunday morning when I get up here. He says, "Joel, what are going to say to all of those people. They know everything you're going to say. You've never been to seminary. You don't have some great theological presentation." But you know what? I refuse to listen to that. (Applause)

You know that scripture comes out of me every time. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Applause)

You know you've got to realize it's not yourself; it's through Christ. And that's what I tell him all the time. I say, "Satan, I don't have to do anything of my own self; it's through Christ." And I tell him all the time: "I'm well able to do everything God's called me to do."

So you have a choice. You can listen to people, you can listen to the enemy, or you can listen to the voice of the Lord, you can listen to the Word of God.

You know I tell sometimes, when Satan tells me that I tell him, "Listen, if I can do nothing else, I can get up there and preach my dad's sermons." (Laughter) And they were good, weren't they? (Applause)

I don't know if y'all realize but for the last 16 years when I produced the television program, after my dad would speak on a Sunday morning, we would get everything he said typed. And then I'd have to time it out. So by the time it was finished, by the time the program aired I'd probably gone over the sermon 5 or 6 times. So I knew exactly—I knew daddy's train of thought. I could finish any story. I could finish any sermon.

And one time—(Applause)—It's funny because one time I think I even surprised my mother. We were in India one time. And we were up on the platform. This was years ago. I don't know if she'll remember this. But we were up on the platform and daddy was conducting this big open-air crusade. And it was a real big platform. And we were sitting over to the side. And it was the last night of the seminar. And we were worn out. We were tired. The time change is like 11 hours difference. So your night is turned into day real quick. But we were up there on the platform and my mother looked at me. And I hope she doesn't mind me telling this. But she looked at me and she said, "Joel, I am so tired." Daddy was up there preaching. "I'm so tired. I don't think I can stay awake." She said, "How much longer do you think he'll go?" And I'm sure daddy would be pleased to know we're talking about how quick he's going to get finished. I hope none of y'all are doing that now. (Laughter) But I knew exactly where daddy was going. He was preaching on thinking the thoughts of God. And I told her, I said, "Oh momma, he's got a little while because he's got 2 more stories to tell." (Laughter) And she looked at me in kind of utter amazement, she said, "What are you talking about? Have you seen his notes." I said, "No, I know exactly where he's going. He's going to tell about these 2 things." And sure enough he told about those 2 things just like I said. (Laughter) But it's funny. My mother, she would never discourage my dad. On the way home from the meetings we were in the car and you know daddy's excited. He in after preaching. He said, "Dodie, how'd I do?" She said, "Oh John, you did great. I could have listened to you for hours." (Laughter) She didn't really say that, but I know she thought it. (Laughter)

But we all have the opportunity. We can choose to listen to the voice of discouragement or we can choose to listen to the Word of God. It's so very simple.

And there's a great account of this in the book of Numbers, chapter 13 & 14. Sometime you need to read it. We talked about last week how God supernaturally brought the children of Israel out of bondage, out of the Egyptian slavery. He brought them by His miracle-working power through the Red Sea. And He took them throughout the wilderness and now in Numbers, chapter 13 they're camped right next to the Promise Land. They're right next door to the Promise Land in a city called Paran. Now you've got to understand some important facts here. God had promised the children of Israel victory. He had promised them that they were going to have the victory. Now He said you're going to have to go in and fight for the land, but He guaranteed them victory. And God told Moses to pick out 12 leaders, 12 good strong leaders to go in and take a look at the land, spy out the land so that he could get his strategy down of how he was going to go in there and fight for the land. And he gave these leaders specific instructions. He said, you go in and find out what the people are like. He said find out what the food is like, what the terrain is like, and find out what the climate's like. Something like that, those basic instructions. But he never once said go in there and come back and tell us whether we should go in or not because God had already guaranteed the victory. And these men went in for 40 days and they came back.

And 10 of them had this report. Ten of them said, "Moses, the land is beautiful. It's awesome, Moses. The climate's great." They said, "Moses, the fruit is just outstanding." I can see one of them pull out a plum maybe from his pocket and say, "Moses, take a bite of this." And Moses bites it and says, "Man, I've never tasted anything like that. It is the land flowing with milk and honey." And you can see the excitement begin to grow.

But then their report changed. Listen to how discouragement came in. They said, "Moses, but the people over there are huge. They're giants. They're the sons of Anak," I think it says. He said, "They look like giants." In modern day language we'd say, "Moses, they look like the Pittsburgh Steelers." You know? "Moses, they all look like Hulk Hogan." You know?

And they came back—and listen how the report changed. Okay that's fine. They gave a report of how the people were. The people were big. But then they began to talk about themselves. They said, "Moses, in our own sight we felt like we were but grasshoppers." You know here's the children of the Living God saying they're grasshoppers. And then they went on to say, "Moses, there's no way that we should go in. The people are too strong. We're not able to defeat them. They will surely devour every one of us."

Listen to how this voice of discouragement—remember how we talked about awhile ago, it spreads like wild fire. Do you know in the book of Numbers, chapter 14, verse 1—don't forget God had promised them victory. But they chose to listen to the voice of discouragement. And the Bible says that they murmured against Moses and Aaron. They said, "Would to God that we would have died out in the wilderness." The people wept and they wept all night. See how strong the voice of discouragement was?

Well they're out there weeping and here comes Joshua and Caleb back. And Joshua and Caleb ripped their clothes. They said, "Guys, what are y'all talking about? God has promised us the victory. God has promised that we can do it. Yes, the people are big, but our God is bigger." And they gave this report of faith. You know the voice of faith. But you know what the Bible says? That the people of Israel chose to listen to the voice of discouragement rather than the voice of faith. They talked about stoning Joshua and Caleb. Isn't that amazing?

See, you've got to remember they were next door to the Promise Land. And some of you today are right next door to the greatest victory that you're ever going to see. And you know the enemy is going to come against you, something you read, something somebody says. Maybe Satan himself will put some thoughts in you. You've got to go on in the things of God. Refute the voice of discouragement with the Word of God

Don't do like they did. You know what they did? One of the translations says that some of the people of Israel talked about getting another leader and marching back to Egypt from whence they came. You see how powerful that is? Remember about Egypt? Egypt they were in slavery. They were in bondage. They wanted to go back to their old life. That's how powerful a tool the voice of discouragement is and how we need to refute the voice of discouragement with the Word of God.

And you know I'm convinced all of us—And I've talked a little bit about this. But all of us in life are going to have people that feel like it's their God-given ability or God-given calling to tell us when we did and when we didn't hear from God. You know that? There's going to be people in your life that are going to want to pull you down, that are going to tell you what your dreams that can't come true. And one way to keep a proper atmosphere of faith is to associate with the right people, associate with the right people. (Applause)

Proverbs 13:20—listen to this. It says, "He that walks with wise men shall be wise; but he that walks with a companion of fools will be destroyed." Powerful scripture! Even psychologists tell us that we hang around with people that we want to be like. It's called the law of the group. Remember daddy use to talk about that. And it's just human nature sometime to gravitate toward that kind of—to the people you want to be like. And you need to examine your life. If you're around people that are always pulling you down, telling you what you can't do, telling you how your dreams aren't going to come to pass. You know what? That's going to hurt you in the long run. You know what they're going to do? They're going to steal the dream right out of your heart, steal the dream. It's so important to associate with the right people. I saw somebody get up and change seats hear just a second ago. (Laughter) I'm just kidding.

Listen! I want to talk to the young people a minute. Associate with the right—I'm going to take it a step further with the young people. How many young people do we have here today? Young people, the people that you associate with are even so much more important. The next few years of your life are the most critical years, I could say, of your life. The decisions that you make are going to affect the rest of your life. And I know some of you are hanging around with people you shouldn't be hanging around with. I know because I'm one of you. I used to do it too sometimes. My dad loved you. He used to talk to you, but it's so important that the people you associate with. I know you say, "Joel, I want to pull them up to my level." But you know what? It's a lot easier for them to pull you down to their level.

The Bible says in Proverbs, I believe its 15:33, a simple scripture, it says, "Bad company corrupts good character." Bad company corrupts good character. Listen, the stain of their sin is eventually going rub off on you. It's so important to run with the right crowd and to—I dare say that 80 to 90% of the temptation that all of us face, if we would associate with good Christian, godly people, the temptations would either be lessened or severely go away. Just associate with the right people.

You know I want to tell you that the devil is a mean devil. Some of you have been running with the wrong crowd and it's been by the grace of God that you're—you know maybe the prayers of your parents that saved you. But God gives us all a will. He gives us all a choice. At one point we have to choose to make the right decision because we're not going to fall under his cover forever. You know the stain of other sin will eventually corrupt us. Bad company corrupts good character.

You know I was thinking about how important it is for us as parents to raise our kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord. So important. If you've got kids that are from birth to 12 or 13, I strongly encourage you to get them into this children's church that we have. They're learning principles of God's word on their own level. Our kids are going to face temptations that we never even dreamed of. And it's a shame on us if we don't get our kids in the church. Especially just because it inconveniences us

a little bit of time. You know our kids are well worth it, aren't they? They're well worth it. Get your kids into church. It's so important to let them know Godly principles at a young age. I've never been so impressed with our children's church until I had children. But Jonathan comes back and he knows scriptures. They teach them on their own level. And some of you watching, you don't go to church. But if you have kids, even if you don't go to church yourself, you ought to go to church for the sake of your kids. (Applause)

You know all the studies show us that kids, if they make a decision for Christ by the time they're 14 or 15 they have like a 80 or 90% better chance of receiving Jesus at that young age. Once they get over that it's much more difficult. They're in the years that they're forming their personality and their character and their values.

But anyway let's get back to associate with the right people. Let me wrap it up by saying, all of us at one time or another are going to have the voice of discouragement come to us. We have a choice. Let's don't be like the children of Israel where they lost their blessing, where they lost their victory. They wondered around in the desert for 40 years, never even got to go to the Promise Land, yet they were camped right next door to it. And I'm sure some of you today are right next to your greatest victory. You've got a choice: believe God's word or listen to the other voices that are going to try to tear you down.

You know I think about in our own life, or my own life. You don't know how many people told my dad that he could never build a church over on this side of town. They said, "John Osteen, it doesn't have freeway exposure," and all these different things. They said the city's not growing out this way. But you know when you've got a dream in your heart from God, God will bring it to pass. Look up here to day, thousands and thousands of God's people studying God's word. (Applause)

Refute the voice of discouragement with the Word of God. Have it so strong in you, when somebody says something negative to you, it'll go off of you like water off of a duck's back. You can hear it, but you can ignore it. And then associate with good Christian, godly people and they'll keep your faith up.

I'm convinced folks, God wants to bring our dreams to pass. He's the one that put them on the inside of us. Don't let anybody else tell you that they can't come to pass. Let's receive God's word. Just lift your hands and praise Him.

Father, we thank You for Your word. We will not listen to the voice of discouragement. We praise You and thank You, Father; we will get Your promises, Your word on the inside of us. It will become alive and active in every one of our hearts, Father. We praise You and we thank You for it, Father. You've made a way of escape.

If you'd please bow your heads in prayer. Let me talk to the guys on TV for just a minute. We're so glad you're viewing today. I want to give you an opportunity to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You know some of you have never even asked Him to come into your life. Well, living the Christian life is the most fulfilled fun life you'll ever live. It doesn't mean you won't have any difficulties, but God makes a way that you can overcome. And if you've never asked Jesus into your heart, just pray this simple prayer with me.

Say, Jesus, come into my heart. Be my Lord and be my Savior. I repent of my old way of living and I'll serve you all the days of my life.

Listen, I believe if you prayed that prayer. You ought to get into a good church. I tell you every week--Lakewood's not the only church. We would love to have you come out here if you can. But if you can't, go to a church that believes the bible in your area and support the pastor. Support him with your attendance and with your giving, and you'll never regret giving your life to God.

And we hope you can come out here and see us some time. Until we see you next week, God bless you.

"HOLDING ON TO YOUR DREAMS, PART 8"

**JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #SER_HOTYD_008 - 5/2/99
(Do All You Can Do to Make Your Dreams Come True)**

DODIE: We welcome you to our program today. We are so glad you've joined us by television. And Joel will be ministering to you in a few moments. But I wanted to read this scripture to you, the 57th Psalm. "Oh God, have pity; for I am trusting you. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until this storm is passed."

Is anybody in a storm? You just hide in the shadow of His wings until it passes. "I'll cry to the God of heaven who does such wonders for me. He will send down help from heaven." Aren't you glad about that? "...To save me because of His love and His faithfulness."

So if you're in a storm, look to God. He'll send down help from heaven because of His love and His faithfulness. And all the people said Amen! (Applause)

JOEL: It's so good to be able to share with you. I look out and I'm awed at the amount of people that come. And God is certainly blessings us. I'm so glad y'all are all faithful. We're y'all proud of my mom throwing out that first pitch. (Applause) Some of you that watch the half-hour program, you may not realize that my mom threw out the first pitch at an Astros ballgame the other day. Gene over at the Astros called us. In honor of my dad he had her throw out the first pitch. But it's kind of a funny story, a little funny to me anyway, the story behind her windup. She came over to my house the day before. She said, "Joel, I really, I've got to practice. I really want to do good. I don't want to just go out there and toss it out, I want to wing it out there." She was striving for excellence. So we got out in my driveway. And I said, "All right, let me see your windup. What are you going to do?" And she went back like this. (Laughter) I said, "Momma, don't embarrass me. That's soft ball." (Laughter) I said, "What you've got to do is you've got to come up over your head real slow." And I tried to make it super dramatic. I had no idea that she would do it. (Laughter) But I was watching her that night and my heart was just beating so badly because she got up and it felt to me like she waited an eternity right there. (Laughter) I thought, "Go on. Go on." She did it. She did great. But you know my mother, she's funny. She's the same in public as she is in person. She's loud. (Laughter) You know we were sitting behind the plate and Craig Biggio hit a home run over the center field wall. And you know my mother's up with both hands up and she's saying, "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord." (Applause)

I tapped her on the shoulder. I said, "Momma, we're at the Astrodome, not at church." She said, "I don't care."

But momma growing up. You heard daddy tell it. She'd pray over the washing machine. She'd pray over the vacuum cleaner. Still to this day prays over parking spots every time she goes out.

One time when I was growing up, I was working on a weed eater and she came over my shoulder. And I was trying to get the line all fixed. And she said, "What's wrong?" I said, "I can't get this thing to work." And she said, just came out of her, she said,

"In the name of Jesus, work!" (Laughter) I looked up and said, "Are you talking about me or the weed eater?" (Laughter) She scares me sometimes. (Applause)

But I did want to thank Gene over at the Astros and Bob McClair. And they always treat our family so good. They always honor us. And we just thank them for the opportunity to do that.

I'm excited about all of y'all being here today. Y'all want to hold up our bibles and we'll study together? Let's say it like you mean it. Let's don't ever forget it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible, (indestructible,) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never, never, never. (Never, never, never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. You may be seated. Open your bibles if you would to the book of James, chapter 2; James, chapter 2. I want to speak to you one last message on Holding on to Your Dreams. This is the 8th message that I've spoken. I trust you've been getting blessed by these. Have you? Amen. Well listen. I want to rap it up today. And I just want to give you a brief introduction. You know God plants dreams in the hearts of every one of us. Dreams, when I say dreams, I'm not talking about something at night. I'm talking about God-given desires, goals, thoughts that He puts into our lives. They're God-given dreams. He puts them there and He wants to see them come to pass. But it's up to us to do our part in making them come to pass. And I've been challenging you for these last 8 weeks to step out in faith, to go further in the things of God. Don't just get in a rut and do the same thing year after year after year. Always be striving to know God more. Always be striving to go further in the things of God. The bible says, "Stir up that gift that is within you."

In the book of Psalm 37:4 has been our master text. It says that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, He would give us the desires of our heart." The Amplified says, "The secret petitions of our heart." What a great scripture that is.

But today I want to talk to you about how we need to do everything we can do to make our dreams come to pass. We need to do our part in seeing our prayers get answered. You see when God gives you a dream, it's a possibility. It doesn't mean that it necessarily is going to positively come to pass. It's a possibility. He's going to see what you're going to do with it

And sometimes in the faith movement or in the Full Gospel movement, we hit a sticking point. We get God's promises in our heart. We pray God's word. We believe God's word and then we sit back and we cross our arms and fold our legs. And we say, "Okay God, now do it to me." But you know there's another step to this. And I'm convinced this is why some of us are not getting our prayers answered. And sometimes it hinders the dream from coming to pass. And it's a very simple scripture

in James 2:17. You all know it, but look at it. It says, "Faith without works is dead." What a powerful little five words. Faith without works is dead. Listen to it in the Amplified. "Faith, if it does not have deeds and actions of obedience to back it up, by itself is destitute of power, inoperative, dead." In other words, you're going to have to do everything you can do to make your dreams come true. You've got to put some actions behind your faith. This is so important. It's so simple, but it's so important.

A lot of times we sit back and say, "God, we're waiting on You." But in reality, God's waiting on us to take that first step of faith. I've read where there are three types of people: aggressive people. These are people that make things happen, aggressive people. There are people that watch things happen. Those are passive people. And then there's people that wonder what happened. (Laughter) I call those--those are Aggies. (Laughter) I'm just kidding. (Boo) My brother-in-law's an Aggie. I couldn't help but say that. I heard a funny Aggie joke and I'll tell you. My mom's going to kick me out of here if I tell too many of these. But I heard about an Aggie that went around the block 40 times. His blinker got stuck. (Laughter)

Listen. But God wants us to be aggressive people. I like to keep y'all awake. (Laughter) I know y'all can't go to sleep in Lakewood. I was watching the service today and watching you know the song service. And then momma throwing in the first pitch. There's a lot of action going on here.

But listen, God wants you to be aggressive in seeing your dreams come to pass. You've got to do everything you can do to make your dreams come to pass.

You know daddy's told the story about a man that lived on the side of a hill. This man lived on this big hill, but he loved gardens. And he really wanted a garden, but there was no place for a garden. He had on the side of his hill, it was just rocks and thorns and old clay dirt. No way he could have a garden.

But you know year and year and year went by and finally he was so determined. He got a wheel barrel out. And he got out there and he got out there himself and he started hauling off all the old rocks. He started getting all the old bushes and all the dead plants out of there. Then he even hauled off all the old clay dirt. And he put a lot of time and effort into this. It took him months and months. And he went back and he put these beautiful tiers of landscape in, put the rich fertile soil in there. He put some landscape rocks. And you know before long, he planted the plants and God caused the plants to grow. Now he looked up and he had a magnificent garden. And one day another fellow was walking by him and said, "Man, God sure has blessed you with a beautiful garden." Said this to the man that had done all that work. And that man thought a minute and he said, "Yea," he said, "He had, but you should have seen this place when God had it all by Himself." (Laughter) You see, there's a simple truth in that. That man could have believed God. He could have prayed. He could have confessed. He could have done everything he knew to do. But until he got out there and put some effort, he put some actions of obedience behind his faith. And then he trusted God for the supernatural part and that was to grow the plants.

And you see, it's so important in our lives. The bible says in II Corinthians 6:1 that we are workers together with Christ. Have you ever read that? It means we work together with God in seeing our dreams come to pass. We work together with God in seeing our prayers get answered.

And the bible says that Jesus said He needs us. Jesus said He is the vine; we are the branches. Do you realize the vine can't produce fruit of itself? It needs the branches to produce fruit. So we got to work together with God. It's not sitting back and—you know I say it a lot. You don't sit back and say, "God, hit me with Your magic wand." No, you've got to do your part. It's so important.

And we all know the scripture in Hebrews 11:6. It says without faith we can't please God. Well, it tells me right there in James 2:17 that if I don't put some actions behind my faith, then my faith is dead, my faith is inoperative. We've got to put actions behind our faith. We've got to do everything we can do to make our dreams come true.

You see, I think that's why when Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus, He said, "Hey guys, roll away the stone and I'll do something supernatural. I'll raise Lazarus." But you know He was Christ, He was the Son of God. He could have rolled away the stone. But no, He wanted them to roll away the stone. And there's a simple truth there that says, Jesus says, "Hey, you do your part and then I'll do My part." But He's saying in effect, if you don't do your part, if you won't roll away the stone, then I'm not going to raise Lazarus. You've got to do the ordinary and trust God for the extraordinary. You've got to do everything you can do to possibly bring your dreams to pass and then trust God to do the impossible. It's up to us. We shouldn't be waiting on God. We've got to put some actions behind our faith.

You know let me tell you a quote from my dad. Man, you know my dad. He was a man of faith. He believed God. He believed in miracles. But listen to what he said. He said, "It is impossible for me to believe God to do something for me that I can do for myself." (Amen) That's a strong statement. It's impossible for God to do something for me that I can do for myself.

You see some of you are trying to get out of debt, but every time you go to the mall you use your credit cards and you buy everything your little old beady eyes see. (Laughter) You haven't heard that in a while. But listen, sometimes we make it too spiritual. You've got to do your part in helping God out. You can't go and just buy, buy, buy. And then when you get home, say, "God, get me out of debt. Get me out of debt. Get me out of debt." You see one hand's defeating the other hand. And God looks up and He said Look, we're supposed to be working together. You're pulling me down. And if you're not going to do your part, God says, "You know I'm not going to do My part." He wants to see if we're going to do everything we can do to make our dreams come true. We've got to be determined.

Some of you are believing God for a promotion at work. Let me ask you something. Are you getting there early? Are you working hard? Are you over producing? Are you over achieving? Let me tell you what happens when you do that. That's when God shows up. He says, Look at my child. They're serious about it. Then He'll pour down His supernatural favor upon you. Then He'll cause your boss to supernaturally see you and say, Hey, it's time to give them a raise. It's time to give them another position. See that's how God works. You can't sit back and be critical and you know, complain and say, "Nobody around here appreciates me." No, you've got to do your part.

And some of you guys, I know, you're my age. You're believing God to get a wife. You've got to do your part. You've got to get out there and you know meet some

Christian friends. Go to some Christian events. Sometimes we sit at home. I know what guys do because I'm one of them. We sit there in front of the TV with that remote control and we watch all the ball games all night long. And you know we have our chips on one side and our coke on one side and we believe God that during half time the doorbell is going to ring and Miss America's going to be there. (Laughter) I know. I believed that before too. (Laughter) No listen, we believe that Miss America's going to open up the door and say, "Where have you been, baby? I've been waiting for you." (Laughter) But you know, it doesn't work like that. You've got to get dressed up. You've got to do your part. You know? You can't be held up in a room 365 days a year and expect God to bring people across your path. You get out there and do your part. Then God will supernaturally send somebody across your path. You know sometimes we think God's going to rain Miss America down the chimney sometime. But we've got to do whatever we can do. I know this is very simple, but it's so important. We sit back so many times and say, "God, do it to me." But God's saying, "Hey, put some deeds of action behind your faith." Do all you know to do to make your dreams come true.

I found in my life, when I can get off of dead center and I can take one step of faith. Even if it's the smallest step of faith, that's when I see God begin to intervene. But if I stay in the same place, you know we don't need God's help. When you take that step of faith, God will begin to intervene and He'll take you places that you never even dreamed of. You know what the Word says, He'll do far more above and beyond what we can even ask or think. That's the way God is. But He's waiting for a child that will at least take the step of faith. Then He begins to intervene. Sometimes the first step is the hardest.

I was thinking about, I remember back in 1972. I mean I don't remember it real clearly. But I was 9 years old. But daddy founded Lakewood Church in 1959. And they started in that little abandoned feed store that you can see out in the front lobby there. But it's just an old feed store and it held about 200 people. And in the early 70's the church really started to grow. And they needed to build a new building. They were outgrowing that building. But all daddy had was 7,000 dollars; all the church had was 7,000 dollars. And you know they didn't have enough money. The building was going to cost about 100,000 dollars.

And one day a friend of my dad's came by, Brother Ward. A lot of y'all know F. E. Ward. He came by and he said, "John," he said, "what are you doing still in this building." And my dad said, "Well, Brother Ward, all I have is 7,000 dollars. I don't have enough money to build a building." You see daddy never wanted to go in debt. What a marvelous thing that is. Everything that we have around here, most of y'all know, is totally and completely paid for. What a great thing that is. And that's why we don't have to ask for money on television because you know God meets all our needs. It's a gift that we give to you.

But I was thinking about the other day before daddy died—I'm getting off track here, but I'll come back. Before he died we were thinking about if we'd ever paid interest in this church. And as far as we know we've never paid a penny of interest in this church. Thank God and all of y'all. (Applause) I mean that's the blessings of God and through faithful people, that's all of you.

But anyway, Brother Ward said, "How much you've got, John?" He said, "I've got 7,000 dollars." He said, "All that will do, Brother Ward is pour the foundation." And

Brother Ward slapped my dad on the back and he said, "John, pour the foundation and see what God will do." In other words, John, put some deeds of action behind your faith and see if God won't move. And you know what? Daddy poured that foundation. And some of y'all remember it, here. It was in 1972 and we had a foundation across the street, out in the middle of nowhere. But you know what? I remember when I was 9 years old. We went all out and we held hands around it and we joined hands and we prayed. And you know what? It wasn't before long, a few weeks, till we had the money for the steel. And then all of a sudden we had the money for the rest of the building. And you know it was that step of faith that led my dad to being to build. And that church expanded and expanded and expanded. And look where we sit today. All because he got off of dead center and put some action behind his faith. You see how important it is?

You know God leads us a step at a time. I'm sure when daddy poured that foundation he thought, "Man, people are going to ridicule me because I don't know quite where I'm going." But you've got to realize once you take the step of faith, you know fear will try to hold you back. But God will lead you a step at a time. It's not so much like—I was thinking about the wise men, when they went to see Jesus to offer Him gifts. God put a big star up in the sky and they traveled months and months toward that. But you know what? I don't believe God does that much any more. He does it like He did the children of Israel when they went through the wilderness, He gave them a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Each day they had to go up there and daily follow God. They had to daily look where the cloud was. And that's the way it is with God. You take a step of faith; He'll show you where to go one step at a time. We would all love to see the future of our lives for the next 30 or 40 years. But it doesn't always work that way. You trust God. You step out in faith. You do everything you know to do to make your dreams come true and I promise you this: God will lead you in the right direction. He'll lead you in the right direction. (Applause)

You know one of the biggest excuses I've ever heard is, "Joel, I'm going to do it at the right time. I promise you I'm going to step out in faith at the right time." Well let me tell you an important key. There will never be a right time. The enemy will make sure there's never a right time. I've heard people tell me, "Joel, when my kids go off to college, then I'm going to really get involved in church, then I'm going to really serve God." But listen, the enemy will make sure that when your kids go off to college something else will come in. And all of a sudden, you've just wasted 10 or 15 years of your life.

You know I've heard people tell me, "Joel, when I get through with this busy season at work, you know, then I'm going to really take time for my family. I'm going to really get my kids in church." But you know what? The enemy will make sure you never get through with that busy season at work. You know that's the trick of the enemy. We've got to do everything we can do and we ought to do it now. Every time we procrastinate, we're missing God's best in our lives. Let's put some deeds of action behind our faith. Let's do everything we know to do to make our dreams come true.

And listen, I'm going to talk to you about one other thing today. And I want you to listen carefully because I want to seem like I'm contradicting myself because this is a fine line. Once you've got God's promise in your heart, you've got the dream there, you've got scriptures to back it up and you're doing everything you know to do, trust

God to supernaturally open up the doors. Don't try to force the doors down and get out of God's will. You do your part, but you trust God for the part that you can't do.

See this, I think this will make it clearer. In Habakkuk 2:2 is a scripture that we've used at the very first of this series. It says, let me read it to you. I'll read it perfect here. It says that—I didn't write it down. I'll tell you what it says. (Laughter) Oh Lord. I've got a good memory, but it's short. (Laughter) Listen, it says this. It says, the vision, when God gives you the vision, write the vision down clearly and plainly on tablets so that everyone that comes by may see it quickly and easily. In other words, God is saying—my mother's proud I got it. My mother's cheering me on. (Laughter) He did it. But listen. In other words, God's saying write the vision down. Write your goals down. And that's what we talked about. We talked about putting them in our bible and knowing where we're going.

But listen. The very next scripture says this: that the vision is for an appointed time. Very important here. The vision is for an appointed time. That tells us there may be some time involved in seeing our dream come to pass. There may be some time involved seeing our prayers answered. But you know, I got to tell you this: you've got to be willing and prepared to wait for it. It's God's appointed time. If you're disappointed if it doesn't come to pass after the first week, well I can tell you this, it's probably not going to materialize. But listen to this. There's a due season with God. This is so important. There's a due season. God's got a due season for all of you.

And once you've done everything you know to do, you've got His promises in your heart, you can sit back and you can rely on God to open up the doors. You see this will eliminate all the frustration. It will eliminate all the disappointment. It will eliminate all the discouragement because you know once you've done everything you can do that it's up to God to bring it to pass. And He's going to bring it to pass at the appointed time, at just the right time. This is such good news because we all have dreams and desires. We have to rely on God and don't get ahead of God, at His appointed time. I'd rather Him bring my dreams to pass at His time rather than my time. So I don't have to be frustrated because something's not happening right now in my life. I know God knows what's best for me and He's going to bring it to pass in due season.

Listen to this verse in Habakkuk 2:3 in another version. It says, "The vision waits for the appointed time and it shall be fulfilled in the end." But listen to this. "If it seems slow, do not despair for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient. They will not be overdue a single day." Isn't that good? Man, that gives me tremendous hope. I've got a lot of dreams and desires and I know you do too. And sometimes it's easy to question in the natural, "Man, why is stuff not happening in my life?" But you've got to trust God. If you're doing everything you can do, you can be absolutely 100% sure that God's going to bring it to pass and it's not going to be a single day late. What a tremendous hope we have. What a tremendous hope we have.

Hebrews 6:12 says that the people through faith and patience inherited the promises. It was through faith and patience. And sometimes you know it's hard to be patient. It's difficult to be patient. You know if I had all my prayers answered, every one of them that I asked right away, I'd be in a lot of trouble. There's a lot of things you know I'm glad they didn't come to pass. And the bible says in Romans 5:4 that through patience our faith is being tested and tried and that we'll come out stronger

in character, we'll come out more mature. It's through patience that this happens. And you know it's, like I said, it's difficult to be patient some times. But being patient is just being consistent, never changing regardless of these circumstances.

And let me tell you an important key. Let me tell you something real important. If you've understood that God's going bring your dream to pass at the appointed time and you realize that there's going to be, there could be some time involved there, maybe some weeks, maybe some months, maybe some years. Some of you look up today and say, "Joel, what do I do in that in between time?" Here's what you do, very important. You remain faithful to what you know God has called you to do. It's so important. Remain faithful to the last time you heard God tell you to do something.

You see, in my own life when I went through high school, I knew I wanted to be involved in television production. I love these cameras. I love to do stuff like that and I didn't even realize but God was putting that dream on the inside of me. And when I graduated from high school, I went off to college like all my other brothers and sisters did because it was just the thing to do. And I sure didn't want to be any dumber than any of them. (Laughter) Okay. I'm just kidding. But you know I just went off because it was the thing to do. But you know what? I didn't even know it was a God-given dream. But I came back after that first year of college and I said, I told my dad. I said, "Daddy," I said, "I want to start a television ministry here. I know this is what God wants me to do."

And I appreciated about my dad one thing is that he always encouraged us kids to chase our own dreams. He always told us, he said, "Joel, you follow after what God wants you to do. Don't try to fulfill my dream." And that's so important, parents. Encourage your kids in what they want to do. I know you have to guide them. Don't let them get off into sin. But hey, if they don't want to do exactly what you want to do, you know, big deal. Let them do what God wants them to do. You know what I mean? No, I don't mean "big deal," but you know what I mean. (Laughter) I mean let them do what they want.

Daddy could have said, "No Joel, you go finish college." But no, he didn't make me do that. And thank God. But I knew that's what I wanted to do. And I remained faithful in this. And you know along the way, the past 16 or 17 years, I can distinctly remember a couple of opportunities I had to go work for other people. And you know one time it was another corporation about 7 or 8 years ago. And it was a good opportunity. And you know my own ambitious desires would say, "Hey, go that direction Joel. That's what you ought to do." But you know I knew it would look good on a resume. It would feed my ego. But you know sometimes—it would pay a lot of money. But sometimes we've got to go back and we've got to make sure we're doing what God told us to do. And you know what? I prayed. I examined my heart. And you know what? I didn't get any direction. God didn't say "yes"; He didn't say "no." But you know what I knew to do? To go back to what I knew God told me to do. And I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had called me to work here with my dad, to be involved with the television ministry, to put his ministry up all over the world. You see, if you're faithful in what you know God's called you to do, the bible says in due time He will exalt you. (Applause)

You see, how do we know? We don't know when God's going to exalt us. We just need to remain faithful. And you know there was another opportunity. That was a

corporation. But there was another opportunity, a job came along with a major ministry, probably the biggest ministry in the world. And they asked me to travel overseas with them. But you know the same thing. I didn't get any direction there. And I thought, "You know what? God, I'm going to remain faithful." And there was sometimes working here, it was a little boring. It wasn't, you know the excitement was gone. It was a little routine. Well, that's how it is all the time in life. But there's nothing like being faithful.

If you're faithful, God will reward you. I mean I can't say enough. And I'll wrap it up here talking about faithfulness. I can't say enough about people that are faithful. This church was built by people that came day in and day out, when it was exciting and when it wasn't exciting. I can look at some of the people here, Sister Smith and Sister Dearman, you know other people here. They've stayed by the stuff. And you know now, today so many people, they-talking about churches. They run to this church for 6 months because it's exciting. Then they run to this church for 6 months. And I don't say that to keep y'all here. I thank God you're here. I hope you're here because you're being fed. But I want you to know the motive of my heart is not to keep you here, but it's to let you know you ought to be rooted and grounded in a local church, and you ought to bloom there. And you ought to support that church through the thick and through the thin. You know, just don't run to where the excitement is. Be faithful. God rewards faithfulness. You're always moving around, you know, I don't think God's going to bless you like He should. And one thing I can say about the Lakewood people is y'all are some of the most faithful people in the world. I look at some of the prayer partners, the ushers, the greeters. And some of you even come in, you sit up top and you know you think nobody knows your name. Listen. The most important One in the world knows your name. That's Almighty God. He sees your faithfulness. (Applause)

Listen to Matthew 25:21. "If you will be faithful in the small things, He will entrust you or put you in charge over much." Be faithful to God. Have a desire that would please God in everything. Do everything you can do to make your dream come to pass. God is watching you. He's not watching you in judgement; He's watching you to see what you're made of. And we ought to have a heart that wants to please our God. And I can't say enough about being faithful, holding on, doing your part. Know that the dream is going to come to pass at the appointed time. Don't get discouraged. Don't get despondent. God's going to bring it to pass in due season and it's not going to be one single solitary day late. God wants to bring your dreams to pass.

Would you bow your heads in prayer with me today? Y'all are so easy to talk to. And it's been a joy to share with you. Some of you that are watching by television, you may not have ever even accepted Jesus. And I don't want to go off the air until we give you the opportunity. I just want to ask you to pray a simple prayer with me. Just mean it from the bottom of your heart. Say, Jesus, come into my heart and save me. I don't know about all this religion, Jesus, but I know that You give life. And I repent of my old way of living and I'm going to serve you all the days of my life. Listen, I believe if you prayed that prayer and meant it, God says you're a new creature. You ought to get in a good church. Serve God in that church. You'll never regret giving your life to God. And we hope you will join us again at this same time next week. It's always great for us to be able to bring our Lakewood services into your home.

VICTORIOUS LIVING

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SONG: At Lakewood Church, we're here for you!

DODIE: We welcome you today to our broadcast. We're so glad that you've joined us. And I believe you're going to be blessed. And I want to read this scripture to you from John 14 out of the Living Bible. "The one who obeys me is the one who loves me. And because he loves me, my Father will love him. And I will too. And I will reveal myself to him."

Thank God. If we obey God and we love Him, then Jesus will love us. If we love the Father, then Jesus will love us. And He'll reveal himself to us. And I need that. I want Him to reveal Himself to me. Don't you? So thank God. We love God and Jesus, His Son. And He will reveal Himself to us. And all the people said? (Amen) (Applause)

PASTOR JOEL: We are so glad to have everybody here at Lakewood Church. I just give you a warm personal welcome whether you're a visitor or a long-time member. It's just an honor and a privilege to have you here. And I'm honored to be able to speak to you.

And those of you watching by television, you ought to come out here and see us sometime. I promise you we've got the most loving, caring, compassionate people. Some of the best people in the world are right here at Lakewood Church. And we just give you a personal invitation to come out and see us. Wouldn't we love to have them sometime? (Applause)

You know I heard a funny story this week. I like to tell them. But I heard about this country preacher. He was invited to preach at this large church in the city. Probably something like Lakewood. He was so excited. The building was filled to capacity. He was sitting down there and just 15 or 20 minutes before he was going to get up on the platform to speak, he realized in all the excitement he'd forgotten his false teeth. And he was just disheartened. And he began to panic. And he grabbed the pastor and he said, "Pastor, I can't speak. I forgot my teeth."

And the pastor picked up the phone and he called a certain fellow by the name of brother Jones and he explained the whole situation to him. And sure enough, brother Jones showed up 5 or 10 minutes later and they met him in the front lobby. And brother Jones pulled out this set of dentures. And he said, "Try this on." And that country preacher tried them on. He said, "I can't preach. These are way too big." Brother Jones said, "No problem, I've got another pair. Try these on." He tried that pair on and they were way too small. Brother Jones said, "No problem. No big deal." And he tried on this third pair. And the third pair fit perfect.

The country preacher went out there and preached the best he'd ever preached. And after the service, he went down there and he found brother Jones and gave him a big hug. And he said, "Brother Jones, I don't know how to thank you enough." He said, "I just thank God for good Christian dentists." He said, "Where's your office

anyway? I've been looking for a dentist." Brother Jones looked kind of puzzled. He said, "What do you mean dentist? I'm not a dentist. I'm an undertaker." (Laughter)

It's okay to laugh in church, isn't it? We are glad to have all of y'all here. The joy of the Lord is our strength. I like to make sure y'all are awake. All right, get your Bible. Let's hold it up. And say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught (Today I will be taught) the Word of God. (the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. Would you please be seated? Open your bibles to the book of psalms, chapter 31, please. Psalm 31.

I want to talk to you again today about how we as New Testament believers should respond to the trials, adversities, and hardships that we face in life. See it's important to know that life is a fight. And if we're going to fight life through effectively, we need to use the principals and the guidelines of God's Word.

See I know some people think that when you get born again, you live your life for God, that you shouldn't have any problems or hardships. But friends, unfortunately that's just not what the Bible teaches. Jesus said very clearly in John 16:33: "In this life, you will have trouble." One translation says, "You'll have frustration, hardship, and distress." But I thank God He didn't stop there. Jesus went on to say, "But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

And you notice the gospel message is a message...it's a message of hope. And I'm so glad I don't have to stand up here and just try to convince you how to live in your problems and live in your adversities. I'd hate to get up here and just try to tell you you might as well get used to living a negative, defeated, miserable life filled with sorrow and heartache. That's not the way it works at all friends. The very word "gospel" means "good news". And the good news is God wants each and every one of you to come out of that adversity victoriously. God wants you to live an overcoming victorious Christian life.

He says in 1st Corinthians, "Thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph." The Bible says in Romans, "In all these things we are more than conquerors." God said in Isaiah that there is "no weapon that is going to be formed against you that will prosper. The Bible says, "If God be for us, who can be against you."

And see today I want to encourage you to never, ever lose your hope. Your hope is like your dream.

You've got to keep that dream alive. See if you don't have any hope you're not going to have any need to have any faith. Because the Bible says that "faith is the substance of things hoped for." Hope is so important. And the key is to always hope in the Lord. Then you won't be disappointed.

See, look at what David said there in Psalms 31, verse 23. "Oh, love the Lord, all his saints. For the Lord preserves the faithful and fully repays the proud person. Be of good courage and he shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord."

I read a true story this week about a submarine that was coming up to the surface of the water to restock its oxygen tanks. It had a large crew of men on it. And unfortunately right as it got to the top of the water, it was rammed by a big ship. And the submarine quickly sank to the bottom of the ocean. This was many, many years ago before they had the technology to prevent that type of accident. It was even before they had two-way radios. So this whole crew of men was down there just waiting to die. They had very little oxygen. There was no way they could get the submarine open once it went back under the water. And they sent many ships to the scene off the Massachusetts coast but there was nothing they could do. They sent divers down there. Nothing they could do.

But there's an interesting account of one diver as he was frantically searching down there. He heard a tapping noise coming from the submarine. He went and put his helmet up against the submarine. And he noticed they were sending out a message in Morse code. And he listened and he said that it was a question that came out ever so slowly. He said it seemed like it took an eternity. Just four little words. They were asking, "Is there any hope?"

And you know, really, that is still the cry of humanity today. "Is there any hope?" You know I spoke with several people at this altar just this week. And they all said the same thing. They said, "Joel, I came this close to committing suicide this week." One man told me, he said, "Joel, I just can't take it any more." He asked the same question: "is there any hope?"

Well thank God today I can stand up here with good news with a smile on my face to let you know we serve the God of all hope. The God of all hope. (Applause)

You know and I don't know what you're going through today. I don't know how dark and hopeless it may seem in the natural. But I want you to leave here assured of one thing. That as long as our God is alive there will always be hope. Never, ever lose your hope. See, Jesus said, "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God."

And you've all heard the saying, "Don't get your hopes up." Well, I want to tell you just the opposite today. I want you to get your hopes up. I want you to leave here flooded with hope knowing that God can do anything. See God can do anything.

See, convince a man that there is no hope and you've done the worst possible thing in the world for him. If I want to be guilty of one thing, it is that every time I got up here I instilled hope in the people. See I know if I can get your hopes up, if you'll have hope, you'll start to have faith. You'll start to exercise your faith. And faith is what moves God to act.

And I realize not all of us are in a hopeless situation. Certainly we're not. And we're not all as desperate as those people I talked about. But still, it's easy to fall into the temptation or the trick of the enemy just to give in and live our life in circumstances that are less than God's best.

See some of you today you've been believing God that your husband will come to church and serve God. And you say, "Joel, I've tried and I've tried and I've tried and he just is not interested in the things of God. He's just not going to come to church with me. I'm just going to forget about it. I'm just going to leave him alone." No, friends, listen, don't ever lose your hope. Don't leave him alone. God can still change that man's life.

See, some of you say, "Joel, I've struggled financially for so long I've just gotten used to living like this." Friends don't get used to it. Don't lose your hope. God can make a difference. God will make a difference.

See, some people I meet, they say, "Joel, I've just lived so negative and so downcast and so depressed, I just guess that's what God has planned for me. I guess that's just my lot in life." No, friends, that's the trick of the enemy to get you into that kind of thinking so that you won't ever experience God's best.

Listen, God's dream for each and every one of you is that you would come out of the adversity you're in stronger, more mature, with a greater confidence in God and His Word. Jesus said, "He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly." John said, "Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers."

In other words, the Holy Spirit was saying that God's greatest desire for us as his children is that we would live an overcoming victorious Christian life. And as I said awhile ago, I don't know what you're going through. It may look very dark. But I want you to know that our God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that you can ask or think. And God can make a way where there seems like there is no way.

See, one key to keep your hope up in the midst of adversity is you've got to get your eyes off your present day circumstances and you've got to turn your focus upward to your all-powerful God. See, what you dwell on you magnify, you enlarge, you empower. If you're always thinking about how bad life is treating you and how negative everything is and how difficult your situation is; you're just making that bigger. You're going to be a negative person.

But friends if you're always thinking about the goodness of God, if you're always dwelling on His greatness and His power and His majesty, then you're going to be filled with hope and you're going to be filled with faith. See, the bigger you make your God, the smaller you make your problems. See, I love the time in Exodus where--go ahead, let's give the Lord a hand clap. (Applause)

I love the time in Exodus where Moses came up to God and he said, "God when I go back to the children of Israel, they're going to ask me what Your name is. What should I tell them God?" And I can just imagine God thinking about it and saying, "Moses, that's a good question, let Me think about it. I'll get back with you." So God says, "You know, maybe I'll tell them..." He thought about it and He said, "Maybe I'll

tell them My name is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord their Provider." And God thought about it and He said, "No, no I'm much more than a provider. Maybe I'll tell them I'm Jehovah Rapha, the Lord their Healer." He said, "No, no, that'd be limiting Me too. Maybe I'll tell them My name is Jehovah Shama, the Lord who is Always Present." But once again, He said, "No, I'm much more than that. Maybe I'll tell them My name is Jehovah Shalom, the Lord their Peace." And then again, He said, "You know what? None of those names are going to work." He said, "Moses come over here. I've got it. I'll tell you what you can tell them. You go back and tell them my name is "I Am that I Am". Isn't that powerful? (Applause)

See we serve the Great I Am. In other words, I am whatever you need. Do you need salvation? The Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Do you need healing? The Bible says, "By the stripes of Jesus we were healed." Do you need power? Jesus said, "I give you power over all the power of the enemy." Do you need strength? The Bible says, "We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us." See what I mean? Do you need hope? The Bible says in Colossians 1:27 that "Christ in us is the hope of glory." See? Do you need courage? The Bible says, God said, "Fear thou not for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will help you. I will strengthen you. I will withhold you with my right hand of righteousness."

See we serve the Great I Am. I am Power. I am Love. I am help. I am healing. I am your provider. You know every good and perfect gift comes from our Father above. And today, I want you to be inspired to have hope. I want you to leave out of here knowing that God can do anything. See, Jeremiah said, "Wow God, you've made the heavens and the earth by your great power and nothing is too difficult for thee."

See, but the key--we've all come to the times in our lives where it's absolutely imperative that we get our eyes off of these present-day circumstances. Like I said, you've got to turn that focus upward to the supernatural, all powerful, ever loving creator of the universe. He's the Great I Am. And have you ever thought about the fact that you know the greatest power in the universe is your very own Heavenly Father? Can you fathom that? I mean that's hard to imagine that the strongest power in the universe is personally concerned about you. He loves each and every one of you individually. He's your Father.

See I know what it is to have a Father that had a lot of influence. Because daddy was so well known and well respected in the community and you know everybody wanted to please him. And he was quite famous around here. And me being his son, I reaped many, many benefits simply because of who my dad was. People wanted to show me favor not because of anything I'd done. They never knew who I was. But when they saw my last name, they wanted to help me simply because of who my dad was.

See, I've told y'all many times before, every place I would go, people would see my last name. They'd say, "Are you related to the minister?" And I'd proudly smile and I'd say, "Yeah, that's my dad." And I've told you about getting pulled over by police men several different times. They'd see my driver's license and they'd ask me that question and they'd give it back. All out of respect to my dad. You know it's an amazing thing.

I'll never forget one time I got pulled over by a policeman. It's just like God. God's been so good to me. But I got pulled over in the access road and about 20 or 30 feet away was one of our Lakewood billboards. And I don't know if you've ever been close to one of those billboards but they are huge in person. If you've ever been close. And I was right at the base of it. And those of you who aren't from around here, the Lakewood billboards have a picture of my dad on them. We have about 14 or 15 of them. Anyway, this officer pulled me over and I thought, man, I said, "Lord, I hope he recognizes my name." And I gave him that card, my driver's license. And sure enough, he asked the question, "Are you related to the minister?"

And I said, "Yeah, as a matter of fact, there's my dad right there." And he kind of looked around like maybe daddy was going to be there in person like he drove up. I said, "No, no, no, right up there." And he looked up and man I tell you he almost passed out. Daddy was so big, his picture's about 20 feet tall. It looked like he was God staring down at us. I'll never forget that. You know daddy had that big grin and it just looked like he was saying, "Don't you dare give my son a ticket." That policeman gave me back my license like he was scared of me. But he let me go. I mean daddy got me out of a lot of tickets.

Now, y'all know how I really do miss my dad. I'll never forget right here on north wayside one time. I was coming back from lunch during the week. And I got pulled over. And I wasn't going that fast. I was only going about 5 or 6 miles over the speed limit but the officer was so nice and so kind. And he talked all about the church. I knew he was going to let me go. And sure enough he did. And I thanked him. I thanked him several different times. But Lois will remember this, about 2 or 3 hours later, the strangest thing happened. That man came down to the church and told my mom and dad on me. (Laughter) I thought, "That rascal, I'd rather have paid the fine than to have told them."

But see I've reaped some tremendous benefits simply because of who my dad was. Because daddy was well respected and well known. But you know, friends, daddy's influence pales into comparison to who our heavenly father is. Have you ever thought about the fact that your very own Father not only created everything, but He's the one that's still in charge of everything. Can't you imagine? We can expect some pretty terrific benefits as well. Listen to what Galatians 4:6 says in the Living Bible.

And because we are His children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. So now we can rightly speak of God as our dear Father. We are no longer slaves but God's own children. And since we are His children, everything He has belongs to us for that is the way He planned it. Isn't that good?

See friends, you'll never, ever lose your hope if you can always remember that the greatest power in the universe is your very own Heavenly Father. And you know what? He's aware of what you're going through. He's concerned about you. He loves you more than you can imagine. And He's closely watching over you as you go through the struggles and trials of life. After all, you know, you're His child. He's responsible for you.

And surely all of us as parents can relate to that. I mean we'd do anything in the world to take care of, watch over, and protect our children. I mean you'd make sure they have everything they need. And if someone dare would try to hurt them or

harm them or to say something harsh or unkind to them, you'd do anything possible to prevent that from happening. You know, as parents, we all feel the same. You can say bad things to me. You can try to hurt me. You can try to harm me. That's one thing. I can deal with that. But when you start to deal with our children, that's a different story. We rise to a new level. We're going to protect them with every fiber of our being. We watch after them, nourish, and protect.

See, I've been up to Walgreens many times at 3 in the morning to pick up a prescription for a child that hadn't been feeling up to par. I didn't think twice about it. Our children are our most important priority. Their well-being is our highest priority. And you know, as parents, we get so in tune with our kids, we know when they're the least bit down. We know when they're going through the smallest struggle. We know when just the smallest thing is wrong with them.

Let me ask you guys a question. Why do we think God is any different? Why do we think God is any different? See, sometimes when we go through trials and the struggles of life, we think that somehow God has turned His back on us and that He's forsaken us. And that He's not hearing us when we pray. You know, we think that God's going to let us go under. We think God's going to let us sink. But when are we ever going to realize God is not like that. He's as close as the very breath that you breathe.

You see, Jesus said, "I am with you always, I'll never leave you nor forsake you." In the book of Matthew, He says, I'll be with you "to the end of the age." In Proverbs, He says, "A God who sticks to you closer than a brother."

See, I never will forget the story that Pastor Gerald Hilley told when he spoke here several months ago. Pastor Hilley is a friend of ours. We've known him for 20 or 30 years.

But a little over six years ago, he had to have emergency open-heart surgery. And he told the story about when he was lying on that operating table waiting for the doctors to come in to begin the surgery. All of a sudden, he became overcome with fear. He said he felt the spirit of death all around him. He closed his eyes and he saw this vision from the Lord. In this vision, he was in this very, very dark, dark room. And he was only one inch tall. He was very, very small. And he looked back and there were two evil forces in the room also. They were huge. They were very distinct. One was death and one was fear. And these evil forces were just tormenting him. They were mocking him and making fun of him and sarcastically laughing at him. Saying things like, "You'll never get out of this operation." "You'll never come out of this room." "You'll never find your God in this dark room." And they laughed. And they said, "Where is your God now?"

And Pastor Hilley, he said, "Lord, where are you?" "Lord, where are you?" "Lord, where are you?" And the more he pled, the more these evil beings just sarcastically and cynically made fun of him. And they just laughed again and said, "Ha, ha, you can't find your God now." And Pastor Hilley said, "Well Lord," he said, "I preached just last Sunday that in our weakness You make us strong." He said, "But God, I don't have any faith. I don't have any strength." He said, "I can't even pray." He said, "God, come and rescue me." But yet it happened again and again. They just continued to torment him.

And then it dawned on him--I'm sure it was the Lord. It dawned on him in this vision that he should look around and try to figure out where he was. And even though he was in this dark room, he began to look around. And all of a sudden he realized that he was actually standing in lap of Jesus. All that time he had been standing in the lap of Jesus. The bible says that Jesus is "seated at the right hand of the Father." And he said he could see the crevices in His robe. And God spoke to him. He said, "Son, you were crying out, Lord, where are you? Lord, where are you? Lord, where are you?" He said, "Son, it's not important where I am. It's important where you are. And you are right there in the middle of my lap."

See, there's a scripture - isn't that good? (Applause) See, sometimes we think that God leaves us in the time of adversity. Friends, God is with you through thick and thin. He's with you through the good times as well as the bad. There's a scripture that says, "God holds his children in the palm of his hand and no man can snatch you away from him." What a promise that is.

See God is very aware-He knows exactly what you're going through. He sees your struggle. He sees every tear you've shed. He sees every sleepless night you've had. He knows exactly what you're going through. He's heard every single prayer that you've prayed. And you know what? He is very concerned. After all, you are his most prized possession. And He's saying to you today, "Whatever you do, don't lose your hope". He's going to see you through. See, the Bible says in Hebrews 4:15 that "God can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities." You know Jesus was here. He lived on this earth for 33 years. He knows what it's like to face the trials and struggles and the hardships of life. He himself has been down.

He himself, the Bible says, was depressed at one time. He was in agony of spirit. He knows what it is to feel sorrow and pain. He's been there just like you have and just like I have. And that's why the Bible says a couple verses later, it says, that's why you've got to "boldly come to the throne of grace so that you may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

See you always keep your hope up if you can just remember that in the midst of adversity God is on your side. God is on your side. If God be for you, who can be against you? Friends, you've got to begin to dwell upon the great I am. Not the "Great I was" or the "Great I used to be". You see, I've heard a couple people say, "Joel, man, it was great when your dad was here. When Pastor John Osteen was here." And I'd say, "Yeah, you know it was." And they didn't mean it wrong by any means. And we all miss my dad. But friends, we've got to remember just because daddy went on to heaven doesn't mean God left. God is still here. He's still performing miracles today. (Applause)

See you've got to remember He's a present tense God. He's the Great I Am. He will never change. I've heard people say, "I know I could have gotten my miracle if I'd just lived during Katherine Kuhlman's day." Or "Joel, I could have just been there during bible days when Jesus was here on this earth." Well, friends, listen we're still in Bible days today. We're writing new chapters in the book of acts every single day. And I agree it would have been great to live here when Jesus was here physically on this earth. But that's not what God had planned. This is our day. This is our generation. You know God's raised all of us up for such a time as this.

And we must remember that God is a God of the now. He's the Great I Am. He's present tense. He's available now to meet your needs. Always remember, he is and will always be the Great I Am. He's the God of the now. Hope is connected to your dream. Never, ever lose your hope. And always be hoping for something. God doesn't want you to remain stagnant. See, I've got the hope that we're going to make such a difference in this city that one day this building is not going to be filled up once on Sunday morning, it's going to be filled up twice on Sunday morning. (Applause)

See, I've got the hope that every one of you will go out of here like flames of fire. So full of the Holy Spirit. So full of God's power that every person you come in contact with will be changed by the power of the Living God. See, I've got the hope that one day, no matter how many services we have, we won't have the room to hold the people that want to come out here and get in on what God is doing.

See I've got the hope that every one of you will be blessed in every area of your life. Not just finances. I believe God is pouring out his wisdom upon you. I believe you're going to...you know God's supernatural favor is going to overtake you. And we're going to rise up and have the healthiest, most prosperous, most sound congregation in this whole nation.

See that's God's dream for all of you. That's God's dream for every one of you. (Applause) God's dream is above all else you prosper and be in health. Our dream is that you would prosper physically, materially, and spiritually as well. See, listen to what Jeremiah says. Talking about people that hope. 17:7. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and has made the Lord his hope and confidence. He is like a tree planted along a riverbank, with its roots reaching deep into the water--a tree not bothered by the heat nor worried by long months of drought. Its leaves stay green and it goes right on producing fruit."

See that's talking about people that hope in the Lord. They have a firm foundation. Their roots go way, way down deep. And in the time of adversity and hardship, one translation says they cannot only sustain it, but right in the midst of the adversity, "they go right on producing luscious fruit." See this is not talking about fly-by-night, fair-weathered Christians that only come to church when they feel like it. Or serve God when they feel like it. This is talking about people just like you. People who wholeheartedly serve God; that have a desire to please God in all areas of their lives. People that want to be used by God for a-you know as a vessel of gold in these last days.

And so today I challenge you never, ever lose your hope. Always hope in the great I am. Hope in the Lord. See I love what David said. He said, "Lord, you alone are my hope. I've trusted you from childhood. Yes, you have been with me from birth and helped me constantly. No wonder I'm always praising you." See, friends, if you're ever tempted to ask that little simple question, "Is there any hope?" Let this answer ring down throughout the corridors of time. As long as our God is alive, there will always be hope. See, Jesus said, "If you can only believe, all things are possible."

Well, it's such a joy to come into your homes each week. And we never like to close the broadcast until we first give you an opportunity to make Jesus the Lord of your life. The Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I want to give you that opportunity right now. Just pray this simple prayer. Say,

Jesus, come into my life. Be my Lord and be my Savior. I want to serve You all the days of my life.

Friend, if you prayed that simple prayer, the Bible says, "you have become a new creature". And you ought to get into a good Bible based church and let them disciple you in the things of God. If you can, come out here to Lakewood. We would love to have you. Until we see you at this same time next week, God bless you and we love you!

Song: At Lakewood Church, we're here for you!

"JEHOSHEPHAT AND THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #VL_002 - 1/23/00

OPENING: At Lakewood Church, we believe in New Beginnings. "Great it is to dream the dream..." Founded by a man who understood the transforming power of love. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you! (Applause)

DODIE: Thank you. We're glad that you're watching us today and I want to share this scripture with you. It's Job 5 in the Living Bible. "My advice to you is to go to God." Now, can you think of any better advice than that? But then it says, "And confess your sins to him." Go to God; confess your sins. "For he does wonderful miracles and marvels without number."

So I want to suggest to you, go to God, confess your sins, accept Jesus into your heart, and then look for His marvels and His miracles that He will do for you. And all the people said, Amen and amen. (Amen/Applause)

JOEL: Well, we do welcome all of you to Lakewood Church. We're so glad to have you with us whether you're a visitor or a long-time member. We're just glad to have you here. I know I tell you often, but we love you and we pray for you and we believe in you. And we know God's got great things in store for each and every one of your lives. Don't ever let the enemy try to tell you that God doesn't have a plan for your life and that He's not concerned about you and that He doesn't love you because friends, that's a lie. God loves you with an everlasting love. You're worth more than the whole world. And, of course, we love you as the Osteen family and as a church family, we love you as well.

Those of you watching by television, we always like to give you a personal invitation to come out here and see us. I know some of you say, Joel, I don't go to church; I'm not a religious person. I don't have a suit and a tie and I've made too many mistakes in the past. But listen, friends, none of that stuff matters. Just come as you are and I guarantee you we will accept you without question. We're not interested in what you-go ahead and give them a hand clap. (Applause)

We're not interested in what you've done in the past. Our goal is to help you find a fresh new start in life. And it comes through the power of God and through a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. God can give you a New Beginning. We believe in New Beginnings around here and we'd love to have you come see us. (Applause)

Hold up your Bible and let's say it like we mean it today. Louder than ever.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is

receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.) Amen. (Amen.)

SERMON: God bless ya'll. Open your Bibles, please, to 2nd Chronicles Chapter 20. Well, it is such a joy and an honor for me to have the opportunity to share with you each week. This is such an exciting time to be alive. God's Spirit is moving mightily all over this world. And I thank God that we're right in the middle of it here at Lakewood Church. We're seeing more people come to the Lord than ever before. I think in the last three weeks, we've had over seven hundred people walk down these church aisles. We're seeing-Amen, that's worth giving the Lord a hand clap for- (Applause)

But we're seeing tremendous growth and increase in every area of our church. God is doing a new thing. It's a time of New Beginnings and I don't believe we've even touched the surface of what God really wants to do for us. I believe He's going to pour out on each of us out of His Spirit in a greater measure in these coming days. I believe each of you are going to experience more of God's power, more of God's favor, more of God's blessings, more of God's presence, more than you've ever even dreamed of.

But friends, you've got to stir yourselves up and do your part to believe God for bigger things in this coming year. You've got to stretch your faith. You've got to enlarge your vision. Go beyond that limited thinking of the past. You've got to expect the unexpected.

See, God wants you to continually be growing and increasing in every area of your life. He wants to bless you more. He wants to use you more. He certainly wants to fulfill your dreams and desires. He wants to meet your needs. But you have to do your part. You cannot get lazy and let your guard down and allow the enemy to steal from you. You've got to stand strong against the forces of darkness and resist them in the name of Jesus.

You've got to develop an unshakable confidence in God. And you've got to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that no matter what adversity you go through, no matter how many hardships you go through, no matter how many problems you have in life, you've got to know that you know that you know that our God is well able to see you through each and every one of them.

See, God is looking for people that are spiritually tough. You will never experience God's best if you just are weak and timid and you get down and discouraged every time trouble comes your way and every time things don't go perfectly your way. You'll never experience God's best. See friends, God never promised us that we were going to go to heaven on flowery beds of ease. Paul said to "fight the good fight of faith".

Life is a fight. And just because you're going through some tough times today doesn't necessarily mean that you've done anything wrong. See Jesus clearly said,

John 16:33, "In this life, you will have trials, frustrations, hardships, and distress. But be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." No matter what you go through in life, you've got to stand strong and don't give up and don't give in. Show the enemy that you are more determined than he is.

Paul said in Ephesians 6:13, "Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand."

And I know that's not very exciting, but Paul did say an evil day would come. And what do we do when our dreams are shattered? What do we do when we get devastating news and tragedy strikes our home? What do we do when all kinds of trouble and calamity hits us so hard that we feel numb? What do we do when we are just facing hopeless situations? What do we do when we don't know really what to do?

Well, there's an interesting story there in 2nd Chronicles, chapter 20. It's about King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. They were certainly facing an impossible situation. It was their evil day. They were surrounded by three large armies that were quickly closing in on them and just about to attack them. There in verse 2 it says that some of Jehoshaphat's men rushed to him to give him the news. They said, "King, we've got terrible, terrible news. A great multitude, a vast army has come against us. They're going to be here any day. And we're outnumbered 10 to 1. We don't have a chance. What are we going to do, King?"

And I'm sure fear shot through the King's body like lightening. That was the worst news that he had ever heard. It was basically a death sentence. I'm sure he was on the verge of panicking. But I can imagine that he got a hold of himself and he said, "Well, gather up all of our belongings. Get the men, the women, the children. Let's not just sit here and get slaughtered. Let's try to outrun them."

But they had to answer him back with great disappointment. "King, there's nowhere to run. We're totally and completely surrounded. The enemy is attacking us from every single direction." And I can hear Jehoshaphat say, "How in the world could that be? That's impossible. What army could possibly be that large?" And they said, "King, it's not one army. We've got bad news-it's three armies coming against us. The people of Moab, Mt. Seir, and Ammon. They have all joined forces against us to make sure that we cannot possibly escape. King, we're at the end of our road. It's only a matter of days, if not hours, before you and me and all of our family, all of our children, we're going to be totally wiped out. It's inevitable."

And see, friends, most likely in life, all of us at one time or another-I hope not. But all of us at one time or another are going to probably face a situation similar to King Jehoshaphat. Where we've been given devastating news and it just seems like there's no possible way out. Maybe it's a doctor that walks in and says, "Man, I'm sorry but there's nothing we can do for you". Maybe it's a husband who walks out on you one day and says, "Forget it. I'm tired. I'm leaving." Maybe it's an employer that walks in and says, "Man, business is really bad. I'm sorry, but we're not going to need you anymore. We're going to have to let you go."

What do we do when trouble hits us so hard that it knocks the wind out of us and we feel like...life just doesn't have any more meaning? It's not worth living? The first thing we usually do is weep. There's nothing wrong with that. God's created us as

emotional beings. And just because we're people of faith does not mean that we're immune to feelings.

I can imagine King Jehoshaphat, he just buried his face in his hands and he began to cry uncontrollably. The people in the Bible weren't superhuman, they were ordinary people just like you and me. They had feelings, they had emotions just like we do.

And I talk a lot about standing strong and resisting the enemy and that's important. But there does come a time and a place for weeping. Our emotions respond to what we're feeling. God made us to feel things. We feel happiness. We feel joy. We feel peace. We feel sadness. We feel anger. And don't ever let anybody try to convince you that it's wrong to weep when tragedy hits your life.

Some of the greatest men in the Bible wept. Abraham, the father of faith, he wept at the death of Sarah. Job wept in the midst of his trial. Joseph wept when he was reunited with his brothers. Peter wept bitterly when he denied he knew the Lord. And even Jesus was overcome with emotion and He wept at the tomb of Lazarus.

And the Bible says, though in Psalm-let me think about it. Good question, Joel. Psalm 34:18. I almost said 55, that's the next one. Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he sees those who are crushed in spirit."

And I know some of you here today in this vast audience, you've gone through great trials, great difficulties, very tough times, very many struggles in life and you've shed many, many tears. I want you to know today that God has seen every one of the tears that you've shed. He's seen every single one.

It was just a year ago that I received a phone call from my mom, 2:11 in the morning. She gave me the bad news. She said, Joel---oh, I said I wasn't going to cry again. (Applause)

Okay, I can do it. Joel, come over quick. Daddy's not breathing. It was the worst news I could have ever heard. It was a phone call I hoped I never would have received. It was my worst nightmare. And I got over there probably in five minutes or less. And I'll never forget seeing the flashing lights from the ambulance and the fire truck.

And you know, sometimes as you live a life of faith and you do your best to please the Lord, you think in the back of your mind that maybe you won't ever have to deal with tragedy; maybe you won't have to ever deal with heartache. But friends, I hate to tell you but it's not true. The storms of life come to each and every one of us.

And the older I get the more I realize that death is really just a huge part of life. Just as we were all born one day, believe it or not, we're going to all die one day. And what we do with those years in between is really what counts.

Ya'll know as well as I do, a year ago today, my dad took his final breath here on this earth and he made his grand entry into heaven. And the pain of him leaving was very difficult. I shed many tears. I still miss him very greatly. But you've got to remember this, God will never let you go through something that is too difficult for you to handle.

And I'll never forget when daddy died, I had this supernatural peace and this supernatural strength and this supernatural calmness on the inside of me. I don't even know how to describe it. I didn't have the least bit of anxiety. I didn't have the least bit of fear. My Spirit was just at total and complete rest. And I could hear the Lord saying to me in that still small voice, "Everything's going to be fine. I'm still in control. Just keep your trust and confidence in me. No weapon formed against you is going to prosper." (Applause)

See, the Bible says in Psalms 55:18, "God delivers us in peace from the battle that is around us". God will always give you the strength and the power that you need to make it through the dark times of your life. He'll give you the strength that you need to come out victoriously. And even though you're going to be tempted to give up, don't ever give up in your time of need.

Ecclesiastes says that there is a time and a season for weeping. But friends, there also comes a time where you've got to dry your tears and you've got to get a hold of yourself and you've got to stand up strong and prepare for the battle. The Bible says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy is going to come in the morning." (Applause)

And if you continue to hold on to grief and sorrow, it will eventually turn into self pity. And before long, if you're not careful, you'll let bitterness develop and you'll start to blame and question God. David said in Psalm 23, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." You've got to go through your period of weeping. You've got to go through that period of grief. You've got to go through that period of sorrow. Then you've got to regroup and refocus on the battle that lies ahead.

See, Jehoshaphat was just given the worst news of his life--certain death sentence. These armies were quickly closing in on him. The Living Bible says he was facing great trouble. He was badly shaken. But now he's gone through his period of grief. He's gone through his period of weeping and it's interesting what he did. The Bible says in verse 3 that he instructed all the people of Judah to go without food. He called a fast. Then he invited people from all across the nation to join him at Jerusalem to pray. And the Bible says that they all went and they gathered reverently before God at the temple. I can imagine they got down on their knees. And the Bible says they turned their faces up toward the heavens. And King Jehoshaphat prayed this powerful prayer. He said, "Oh Lord God, there is no God in the heavens except You. There is no god like You. You are so strong, so mighty, so powerful. Who can stand against You? You have delivered us out of the land of the heathen. And You have given this land freely to Your friend, Abraham. And You promised that his descendants would have it from now on. And God, we are his descendants. But now God, these three mighty armies are coming against us. But we know God, You have the power to stop them. We know nothing is too hard for You. But God we stand here in our own power and in our own might, in our own ability. We don't have any strength to stand against this mighty army. We don't know what to do God. But our eyes are upon You."

See, friends, when you come to a place in your life where it just seems hopeless and in the natural you just can't see any possible solution...and really you just don't know what to do, you've got to do what King Jehoshaphat did. You've got to turn your eyes up toward the Great I Am. You've got to turn all your focus toward the

Omnipotent, All powerful Creator of the Universe. You've got to keep your eyes focused upon Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord your Provider. You've got to think about El Shaddai, the God Who is More Than Enough.

And see, you've got to lift your hands toward the heavens like Jehoshaphat did and do three things. Number one, remind God who He is. Number two, remind God and thank Him for what He's done for you in the past. And number three, remind God of the promises in His Word that you're standing on.

In my time of need, I like to pray something like this. Father God, I thank you that You are the only true and living God. And You are the God that spoke these very worlds into existence by Your mighty power. God, You flung the stars into space and there is no power that is greater and stronger than Your power. And God I thank you for all that You've done for me. You have called me out of darkness into Your marvelous light. God, I didn't choose You, You said You chose me before the foundation of the world. And I am so grateful, Father. You have saved me. You have redeemed me. You have washed me in Your blood. Now, I can stand before You totally and completely clean, without any kind of guilt or any kind of condemnation. You have made me a new creature in Christ Jesus. And Father, as I look back over my life, I thank you for healing my sister Lisa of that crippling birth injury. I thank you for healing my mother of cancer in 1981. I thank you for giving me a beautiful wife and two healthy children. I thank you Father for all those times You've spared my life and You've protected me from danger. God, how can I praise You enough. But God, You said now that I can come boldly to the throne of Grace to find mercy and find grace to help in time of need. And God I've got a great big need now. But God I know that's not unusual because in the book of Psalms, Your Word says that "many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers us out of them all."(Applause)

Father, I thank you Your Word says in Isaiah that you'll "go before me and make the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth". I thank you Father Your word says in Deuteronomy that you would defeat my enemies. When they come against me one way, You'd cause them to flee seven different ways. Father, I thank you that Your Word says all through Romans and Corinthians that I'm "more than a conqueror" and that "you always cause me to triumph". But God, now I'm facing this hopeless situation. Just like Jehoshaphat, I'm surrounded by trouble. In the natural, I don't see how I'm ever going to make it through. In the natural, I don't see how I'm ever going to get out of debt. In the natural, I don't see how my family's ever going to come into your kingdom. In the natural, I don't see how my dreams are ever going to come true. But God I'm not the least bit worried about it because I am not focusing on the natural. I am not focusing on my present day circumstances. God, my total and complete trust and confidence is in you. My eyes are completely focused on the great God that You are. And You are a supernatural God. See friends-let's give the Lord a hand clap. (Applause)

See friends, if you pray like that and stand strong like that and keep a positive attitude of faith and just continually praise and thank God that the answer's on the way, I guarantee you that God will meet you in your point of need. What do you do when you don't know what to do? Focus all of your attention on the Majesty and greatness of our God.

One scripture says, "let heaven fill your thoughts". Meditate on what an awesome God He is. Think about all those times that He saved you and rescued you in the past. Think about all those time that's He's made a way when there was no way.

See, you've got to understand you cannot focus and continually think about all the tragedy and turmoil that's surrounding you. Don't focus on your present day circumstances. Quit listening to that talk that's trying to drag you down and to tell you all the reasons why you're never going to make it through your situation. You've got to see past your current condition and you've got to see yourself victoriously. You can't continually think about how big your problem is, you've got to continually think about how big your God is.

See, if you continually only focus on your present day circumstances, that means you're looking down. You've got to change your focus. The Psalmist said, "I will lift up my eyes to the heavens because that's where my help comes from. My help comes from the God who made the heavens."

And see, Jehoshaphat was surrounded by all these armies. He said, God, we don't know what to do, but our eyes are upon you. What happens when you keep your focus on the Almighty God in your time of need? In verse 13 it says that as the people were all there looking up towards the heavens, the young people, the children, the men. As they were all there staring up towards the heavens, something supernatural happened. God supernaturally moves when you keep your focus on Him.

The Bible says, "the spirit of the Lord came upon Jehaziel and he began to prophesy." And in verse 15, he said, "Listen to me people, carefully; King Jehoshaphat, listen to me closely. The Word of the Lord says, Do not be afraid. Do not be paralyzed by this mighty army because the battle is not yours, but the battle is God's." Isn't that good? (Applause)

Friends, when you keep your focus on the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords in your dark time of need, when you keep your total trust and confidence in Him. When you don't rely on your own strength and your own ability, then you really don't have a thing in the world to worry about. Because God says that you're not even going to have to get in the battle, you're not even going to have to get involved in the battle. He promises that He's going to fight those battles for you. See, Proverbs 21:31 says, "Go ahead and prepare for conflict, but victory comes from our God." (Applause)

And God told the people of Judah to do something very, very strange. He said, I want you to march down toward the enemy and attack them. Now that didn't make sense because like I said they were probably outnumbered 10 to 1. In the natural, that was terrible strategy. But we've got to remember that God is smarter and wiser than we are. We've got to learn to let God be God. He knows what He's doing. And even when we don't understand Him, we still must learn to trust Him and be obedient to Him.

In verse 17, God reminded them again, He said, You're not going to have to even fight in this battle. Just go take your position and then stand still and see the deliverance of the Lord. He said, Fear not, be not dismayed, for when you go down into that battle tomorrow morning, I'm going to be right there in the midst of you.

And friends, God works in such mysterious ways. The Bible says that Jehoshaphat put the singers and the musicians out in front of his army. And with every step toward the enemy, they shouted loudly, "The Lord is good and His mercy endures forever." The Lord is good and His mercy endures forever!

And can't you imagine with every step they took they got louder and louder. That adrenaline was pumping. And the Bible says in verse 22 that the very moment they began to sing and shout the praises of God that the Lord caused the three enemy armies to get confused and begin to fight amongst themselves. And by the time the army of Judah arrived at the camp, not a single one of the enemies remained alive. God supernaturally caused them to destroy each other. Isn't God an awesome God? (Applause)

And the Bible says when King Jehoshaphat got to the enemy's camp and he realized that the enemy was already defeated, he saw all those dead bodies there, well he instructed the people of Judah to go out there and gather up the spoils. And in verse 25 it says that there was so much cattle; there was so much money; there was so much clothing; there was so much jewelry that it took them three full days to cart off all that treasure God had given them. And the bible says they went back to Jerusalem rejoicing greatly and shouting the praises of God. And the Bible also says that this good news of how God supernaturally defeated their enemies and supernaturally took care of them could not be suppressed. But it traveled all over quickly throughout the neighboring countries.

And I was thinking today this is exactly what's happened to us here at Lakewood Church. A year ago, we were facing an impossible situation. Certainly it was our darkest hour that we have ever faced. It was our evil day. Here's my dad after Pastoring the church, our beloved leader for over 40 years, he goes on to heaven. And really, we didn't know what to do. But we all gathered here at Lakewood just like Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah did. And we turned our faces toward God. And we were honest and open. We said, God we don't really know what to do but our eyes are totally and completely upon You. We are trusting You to guide us. We are trusting You to give us the wisdom that we need.

And thank God today, on the anniversary of daddy's death, we can stand here triumphantly and victoriously. And we can boldly say that God, You are so faithful. You have done it again. You have brought us through the fire without even the smell of smoke. (Applause)

See, most people thought we'd be closed up, drifted away, and gone by now. The critics said we'd never make it. The scholars said we'd never survive. And the whole world's been watching Lakewood to see what would happen. But friends, thank God because we have kept our focus on the Most High God-(Applause)

Because we have kept our focus on the Most High God, the Lord has fought our battles for us and now we're stronger than ever. And the news of how God has supernaturally taken care of us and supernaturally delivered us from our enemies cannot be contained. We are a living, breathing testimony to this whole world that God is still alive and He is still on the throne. God's a good God! (Applause)

And now we have entered into the time to gather up the spoils. It's time to gather up the harvest. It's time to recover all from the enemy. Just as it took the children of

Judah three full days to recover all that treasure God had given them, I believe it's going to take us many, many, many years to recover all the good things that God has in store for us. Our enemy is eternally defeated.

So I challenge you today to rise up in the name of Jesus and take back everything the enemy has stolen from you. See, friends, (Applause) --it's time to take back our families in the name of Jesus. It's time to take back our finances in the name of Jesus. It's time to take back our marriages in the name of Jesus. It's time to take back our young people and our children in the name of Jesus. This is the time to recover all. We've entered into that time to recover all.

So stand strong and be determined and stay focused and be faithful to come to church every time the doors open. What do you do when you don't know what to do? Keep your eyes on the Most High God and He will always bring you through victoriously. (Applause)

"LIVING A LIFE OF FORGIVENESS"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #VL_003 - 3/5/00

OPENING: The only thing that matters starts today! At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. Join us this Sunday. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!(Applause)

DODIE: Praise the Lord! I am so glad you joined us by television today. And I wanted to tell you something and the people here at Lakewood Church. Thirty-seven years ago, on this day at a hospital here in the Houston area, I had a beautiful little baby boy. And his name was Joel Scott Osteen. And he weighed 9 pounds and 5 ounces. And John and I were so proud of that little baby boy. We already had three others, but we were so proud to have another little baby boy. And you know what? He grew up to be such a fine young man. And I didn't know that his daddy would go to heaven and that God would call him to pastor this church. But that's what happened. And I'm proud of him. I know John is proud of him. I know Jesus is proud of him. Victoria, you and Paul and Jennifer come. The family is proud of him. And this big family is proud of him. And I know you're proud of him that are watching us on television. Happy birthday! (Applause)

JOEL: Thank ya'll! I do appreciate all ya'll coming to my birthday party. (Laughter) I'm just wondering where my presents are. (Laughter) Nooo! No surprises after the 8:30 service. But we're just glad to have everybody here. We welcome you to Lakewood Church and we love all of you. And those of you watching by television, we trust you'll come out and see us whenever you can. You have our personal invitation to come out here. I know it looks like there's no room. But there's plenty of room. We'll make room for you. We've got a whole service at 8:30. So you come out here and meet some of the folks here at Lakewood and worship God with us whenever you can. We'd love to have you.

We've got a great Children's facility, too. We just dedicated babies. How many of you all have young children? Quite a few of you. I do too. And you know, young kids always keep you laughing, don't they? Somebody sent me an e-mail of three or four funny little incidents in children's lives. Listen to this. A small child with a bad cough was taken by her parents to the emergency room. A nurse while examining the child's lungs with a stethoscope told the child I have to see if Barney's in there. The child replied, I have Jesus in my heart. But Barney's on my underwear. (Laughter)

A four-year-old boy told his father he had a stomach ache. And the dad said, That's because it's empty. You'd feel better if you had something in it. He gave his son a glass of orange juice. A couple of days later, the family pastor came to visit. The Pastor mentioned that he had a terrible headache. The little boy responded, That's because it's empty. You'd be better off with something in it. (Laughter)

When a Pastor heard a little boy use a curse word. He said, son, every time I hear you swear a cold chill runs down my back. Gee, said the little boy, if you'd been at our house yesterday when mom slammed the door on dad's finger, you would have frozen to death. (Laughter)

Well, we are glad to have all of you here today. It's okay to laugh in church isn't it? Amen. Well, hold your bibles up and we'll get started.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless ya'll. Please be seated. Open your bibles if you would to the book of Psalms, chapter 139. Psalms 139. David is one of my favorite people in the bible. He said in verses 23 and 24, "Search me, oh God, and know my heart. Test my thoughts, point out anything you find in me that makes you sad and lead me along the path of everlasting life."

One of the most important things that we can do in our Christian life is to routinely examine ourselves and make sure that everything we're doing and everything about us is well pleasing to the Lord. The bible says in Hebrews 12:1, "Lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us."

And one of the greatest weights or greatest hindrances I've ever seen that keeps people back from living an overcoming, victorious Christian life is the fact that people harbor so much unforgiveness and bitterness in their lives.

And Jesus talked so often about the importance of living a life of forgiveness. It'd take us a couple hours to go over all the scriptures. But He summed it up best in Matthew 6:15 when He said, "If you are not willing to forgive other people their trespasses against you, then your Father in heaven is going to be unwilling to forgive you your trespasses."

And see, I just want to challenge all of you today to make a quality decision to live a life of forgiveness. You've just got to make up your mind to release all of that hurt, release all that pain, release all that bitterness and just totally wholeheartedly forgive everybody that's ever done you any wrong. Maybe your husband walked out on you and left you with all these kids to raise. And you've just got so much anger and hatred in your heart toward him. You just don't think you'll ever be able to forgive. You just don't think you'll ever be able to love again. But friends, no matter how painful or difficult it may be, you have to forgive him before you can go on with your life. You've got to just release it once and for all.

See, when you don't forgive somebody, you're not hurting them, you're not effecting them at all. All you're really doing is hurting yourself. And all of us know people today that are so mad at God. They're angry because something happened in their life. But friend, I hate to disappoint you, just because you're mad at God doesn't mean He's having a bad day. God's not affected.

And when we don't forgive other people, all we're really doing is poisoning our own selves. And I know some of you here today, you have very, very painful memories. Maybe you were mistreated or even abused when you were a child and you're harboring all this unforgiveness and you just can't seem to let it go. And you say, Joel, that's the past anyway. It's not affecting me now. It's not hurting me now. The past is the past. But friends, with all due respect, it is affecting you now. It is like poison that's stored deep down on the inside of you and it will and it does affect you and influence you in many areas of your life without you even realizing it. And you can't just try to sweep this stuff under the rug and act like it doesn't exist or try to deny the fact that it ever happened. No, friends, because eventually it is going to rise to the surface and cause you problems. The deeper you bury it, the longer you hold on to it, the more you put it off, the harder it's going to be to eventually deal with.

Daddy used to tell the story about a young lady. She got married. For several years, she could not have a normal relationship with her husband. She couldn't really give herself to him and enjoy the relationship that God wants us to enjoy as husband and wife. She couldn't even stand for him to touch her. She couldn't stand for him to be close to her. And obviously this was beginning to destroy their marriage. It was driving a wedge between the two of them and they were on the verge of divorce. And the amazing thing is this woman did not know why she acted that way. She did not know why she felt that way. Finally, one day she prayed and she said, God show me what's wrong with me. God show me why I can't have a normal relationship with my husband. And God gave her a dream and reminded her of something that had happened to her when she was just a little child. In this dream, she saw herself when she was just ten or eleven years old. And in this dream, she was at the lake swimming and there were some other boys there that were older than she was and they came over to her and they molested her. They raped her. And she was enraged and so full of anger and so full of hatred toward those boys. She ran away from that lake screaming at the top of her lungs, I hate you. I hate you. I hate all men. And I'll never allow another man to touch me as long as I live. See, she had all this anger and hatred bottled up on the inside of her. She didn't even know it. And yet it was affecting her relationship with her husband some 25 years later. It was a very painful memory. She was wronged. She was grossly mistreated. It wasn't her fault. Those boys were the ones to blame. But yet she was the one who had to deal with it before she could ever expect to have a normal relationship with her husband or any other man for that matter. She knew it was going to be difficult, but she prayed and she asked God to help her to be able to forgive those boys. And she said, I just totally released all this anger; I released all this bitterness and resentment toward those boys, and any other man. And she said, from that moment on, I was able to enter into a healthy, fulfilled relationship with my husband. It saved their marriage. But the point I'm making is she had all this hurt and pain locked up on the inside of her and she didn't even realize it. See, that's what I'm talking about today friends. You cannot continually put all this junk into your life, all this anger, all this resentment, all this hatred, all this ill-will, and just keep pushing it down and pushing it down and pushing it down and think that it's not going to ever hurt you. Because friend, it will hurt you. It's going to affect you, I promise you it will. It's going to

continue to rise to the surface and cause you problems in life. I'm talking about examining your heart today.

See, I remember a story, I was just reading recently about this toxic waste that these big companies buried deep underground many, many years ago in these great big containers. And they didn't think much about it then. But now, unfortunately, these containers had begun to leak. And that toxic waste is rising to the surface and it's causing all these terrible problems. It's killing all the vegetation. It's contaminating water supply. It's even effecting the health of the people, especially the newborn babies.

What's the big problem? Somebody tried to bury something that was just too toxic. It just couldn't be contained. Somebody thought they could get rid of this waste and once and for all be done with it. Get it out of our hair. But they never dreamed that it was too poisonous, too toxic, too powerful for these containers to hold. They never dreamed that it would resurface again one day. They never dreamed that it'd come back to haunt them and they'd have to deal with it all over again. But this time being much, much worse than the first. If they would have only disposed of it properly in the first place, they would have never had to deal with it again.

And see, today so many people in their lives are burying things in their so-called leak proof containers. We're cramming all this unforgiveness, all this bitterness, all this hatred in there into these big barrels and we seal the lid and then we bury it as deep as we possibly can. And we think, Good, now we're not going to have to deal with it. Took care of that problem. But friends, unfortunately, just like that toxic waste, it's going to come back to resurface and it's going to leak out and begin to contaminate and destroy and corrupt your own lives. You cannot live with poison on the inside of you and not expect for it to harm you because friends, it will. It will harm you.

What does this toxic waste look like when it comes out in our lives? How is it displayed? In some people it's simply anger. We all know people that just blow up and get really angry over the smallest, most insignificant problem. Their anger is very unproportionate to the events taking place. What's happening with these people? They have so much unresolved anger on the inside of them it's trying to escape any way it possibly can.

I herd this story about a famous welter-weight boxer by the name of James Tony. He was known for his aggressiveness in the ring. He packed a powerful punch. He fought like a man that was possessed. And he was very, very good. He was the welter-weight champion of the world for many, many years. And one day after one of his fights, a reporter asked him, James, what makes you so good? Why do you fight with such incredible passion? And with such tremendous aggression in the ring? And of course, that reporter thought he'd get a standard answer that we've all heard you know a thousand times. Like, I just love to box. This is my life. This is what I love to do. But that's not what James said. He said, Sir, do you really want to know why I fight with such anger and with such aggression? He said, it's because my dad abandoned me when I was a child. And he left all of my brothers and sisters fatherless and alone for my mother to raise by herself. And every time I step into that ring, I'll picture my dad's face on my opponent's face. I have such anger and I have such hatred toward him I just explode. And I know that if I can rip his face off, every single time I'll win.

See, he was driven by this unresolved anger that was buried deep down on the inside of him. And so many people live like that today. And friends, no doubt, some of you here are in here today and maybe just like that young lady, you don't know why you act a certain way. You don't know why you feel a certain way. There are issues in your life that you know aren't right. You know they're not pleasing to God but you just kind of keep sweeping it under the rug and you don't want to deal with it. You deny it. You just hope that one day it'll improve.

But friends, that's not what we ought to do. What we ought to do is just what that young lady did. We ought to go to God and say, God, examine my life God. God, show me the reason why I act the way I act. Show me the reason why I feel this way God. God, show me what is causing all these insecurities and fears and weaknesses. And see, friends, I promise you if you do that God will show you and then you can begin to deal with it and go on living a victorious, abundant Christian life that God wants you to live.

But first you've got to take care of this other problem first. See, the bible says in 1st Corinthians 11:28, "Let each man examine himself." One translation says, "Let every man look into his own heart." See, I'm a big believer in continually checking up on yourself, continually ask God, Is there anything in my life that is displeasing to You? And then when God points out something, be quick to take care of that situation.

Some of you in here today are living a life that is less than God's best because you refuse to deal with the issues that God keeps bringing up. Maybe, you know, today we're talking about forgiveness. Maybe God keeps telling you to forgive somebody and you just will not forgive them. The anger is too much. The hatred is too much. It's too much of a painful memory. You would just rather sweep it under the rug. But friends, the way to really start the healing process is to get it out in the open. It's been buried long enough You've denied it long enough. You've just got to be open and honest toward God. You've got to come to Him and say, God, I was wronged. I was hurt. It wasn't my fault, God. And God I can't do this on my own. But God with your help, I just choose to forgive everybody that's ever hurt me. God I refuse to let this poison eat away my life. God I refuse to give Satan a hold in my life by living a life of unforgiveness.

See, years ago, there was this terrible outbreak of disease in this small village, and I believe in a little remote area of Africa. And both the children and the adults were overcome with all this nausea and vomiting and all this sickness and disease. After several weeks, it got so bad, the people began to die. It was a tremendous epidemic. It was certain to wipe out the whole village before long. And so word quickly reached the main city about what was happening. And they sent in all these experts to try to find out what the problem was. And after several days of testing, those experts discovered that their water was contaminated and it was causing all these terrible problems. Now, that village got their water from a pure mountain spring. So, all these experts decided that they needed to travel upstream to find the source and the cause of that problem. And they did just that. They traveled for days and days and days. They didn't find anything. Finally, they came to the original source of that stream. And they were a little puzzled. They were a little confused because everything on the surface looked fine. But before they left, they decided to send divers in deep into the water to try to get close to the source of that spring as possible. And when they did that, much to their surprise, they found this huge mother pig and all of her piglets stuck right there at the source of that spring.

Somehow, the pigs must have fallen in and drowned and become wedged right there at the opening. And now all this crystal clear mountain spring water was immediately being polluted and contaminated as it flowed right past the dead remains of that old group of pigs. Now, all they had to do was to remain the pigs--remove the pigs. I finally got a laugh today. I told the first group, Ya'll sure are quiet. Must be a serious subject.

But now all they had to do was to remove those old dead pigs and once again, the water was made perfectly pure. And see, the principal is the same in our own lives. Many times, there are negative things that have happened to us maybe even years and years ago. Somebody hurt us. Somebody mistreated us. We were wronged. But yet, we never took the time to take care of that situation and to release it and give it to God and forgive everybody involved. And now even many, many years later, it is still polluting our own lives just like those dead pigs.

Our personality, our emotions, our actions. Everything about us is affected. And sometimes we've learned to live with it so long that we just sort of accept it as the way we are. We say, God, I'm just not a very loving, forgiving person. God, I've just been hurt too many times. I just can't do it God. And see, we allow all this anger and resentment and bitterness to build up in our lives and we mistakenly think it's not hurting anything. But friends, it's destroying our lives. And it is stopping the flow of God's blessings and God's favor in your lives.

And just like that little village, until you're willing to go back upstream and find and correct the source of the problem, you will never get rid of this pollution in your life. Everything else is just a temporary fix. You've got to find the source. Every one of us needs to find our so-called pigs. You've got to examine your life. Ask God to point out anything in you that is not pleasing to Him. And then once He does, be quick to forgive. Be quick to release this unforgiveness, this bitterness, this hatred. I just was dealing with a man down here on this altar a couple of weeks ago. He asked me to pray for him. I said sure. And I could tell by talking to him a moment that he was a very bitter, angry person. He was uptight about something. And I thought he was probably going through a very bitter divorce or maybe he was facing a terminal disease. I didn't know. But he was uptight. I asked him, I said, Sir, what do you want to pray about. He said, Joel, I just want you to pray for me that I'll become a better person. And I said, Sir, that's fine. I'll do that. But, you know, I said, don't take this wrong. But you seem really uptight. You seem really angry. Are you sure there's not something more specific you want to pray about. He said, No, Joel, I'm fine. I still wasn't convinced. And we ended up talking maybe ten or fifteen minutes. And finally, he let his guard down and he was very open and honest with me. And listen to this carefully. That man was extremely angry and extremely bitter toward Almighty God because his dad was killed in an accident when he was just a little boy. Now, you've got to understand this. That man had been carrying around all this anger. It was boiling over. All this hatred. All this bitterness for over 40 years. And it was destroying his life. It was eating him up on the inside. And he didn't even realize it. He had found his pigs.

And friends, even when you don't understand why, you still have to release it and give it to God. Some of you have been the victims. It hasn't been your fault. You were mistreated. Life hasn't treated you fair. But still friends, you've just got to release it all and come to God with a pure heart and just give it to God even when you don't understand it.

And I told that man, I don't know why that man was killed. I can't explain it. I can't explain why many of the bad things happen to people in life. But all we can ever do is go back to the fundamental truths of God's Word and that is number one, God is a good God and He is the Giver of good things to His children. And the devil is a mean devil. He is the one trying to steal, kill, and destroy from you. He is the trouble maker. He's the one trying to bring all that misery into your life. Don't ever get God mixed up with the devil.

And even when you can't understand why you go through certain things, we've got to learn to be quick to say God, I don't understand why, but I refuse to dissect the situation, I refuse to overanalyze the situation, I refuse to point the finger and try to find out who's fault and who is to blame. No, God, I just give it all to you. God I want to live with a pure heart towards you. God, I'm not going to allow any of this junk to poison my life.

I know some of you in here today, you don't really think you could ever forgive the people that have hurt you so bad. But my challenge to you today is to ask God to help you be able to forgive. See, I'm convinced if you have a willing heart, if you have a sincere desire, if you want to forgive, even if you don't have enough strength to do it on your own, God will give you the supernatural strength to forgive. Philippians 3:13 says, "to forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead." Many people have a real hang-up with this scripture. They come to me and say, Joel, how can I ever forget the past? How can I ever possibly forget what's happened to me? Joel, I can forgive, but how can I ever forget? And friends, this may surprise you, but I don't believe you can forget. I don't believe that's what the Holy Spirit was saying. You can't forget a terribly painful experience in your life. You can't forget a bitter divorce that you went through. I can't forget the death of my dad.

No, what the Holy Spirit was really saying, I believe, when he said "forget the past" is simply don't dwell on the past. God does not expect us to purge our memory of our past hurts and pains. He just doesn't want us to constantly relive all those painful memories every other day. You'll never go on with your life if you do that. You've got to forgive the people that have wronged you. Once and for all, give it to God. Just release it and then quit thinking about it. Quit dwelling on it. Don't dwell on the negative side of that memory whatsoever.

See, every time you think of something in your past that has caused you great hurt and pain, you stand at a fork in the road. And each time, you've got to choose which road you're going to go down. Now one road leads to just reliving all that trauma, all that heartache, and all that pain. This road is sure to keep you full of unforgiveness and bitterness and all these other negative emotions. You never go anywhere when you go down this road because it just circles back around and you always end up at exactly the same place.

On the other hand, the second road leads to God's mercy and God's grace. And when you travel down this road, instead of your past hardships being painful memories, they will become trophies to remind you of just how much God helps you make it through that difficult time in your life. Every one of you has a choice when it comes to dealing with your past. And if you have not released all that unforgiveness, then every time you think of that memory, it's going to cause you more pain. It's going to cause you even more hurt. But if you will just give it to God and let it just go, God's

mercy and God's grace will take over. And every time you think of that memory, he'll bring a pleasant smile to your face and you'll think, God, You are such a good God. You've brought me through that dark hour. You have such incredible mercy and grace that has helped me in my time of need.

See, God wants to take your scars and turn them into stars for His glory. And see, (applause) And see, I never thought I could make it through the death of my dad. Daddy and I were very close. For 18 years we worked together hand in hand. I got to travel all over the world with him. We were best friends, and daddy was my hero. And I just prayed years back, God, how am I ever going to make it. I don't see how I'm going to make it when my dad's gone. But you know when I look back now, a little over a year, a year and a month or so, at what should be a very painful memory. You know what, it's not painful at all. All I could think about when I think about my dad's death is the great strength and incredible peace and calmness that God gave me during that time.

See, friends, your past doesn't have to come back and haunt you. It can be trophy to remind you of what an awesome God we serve. And I challenge you again today (Applause) I challenge you again today. I've said it a dozen times. But examine your heart. Ask God to point out anything in you that is displeasing to Him. Let's be quick to get rid of all these weights that are holding us back from being our best for the Lord.

Listen, friends, we're living in the last of the last days. God's got big things for us to do. We don't need to be carrying around any excess baggage. And it is my prayer today that every one of you will leave here freer than you've ever been before. And God won't be able to point out anything within you that makes Him sad. And I love each and every one of you. I want you to live a life of forgiveness. It'll bring great joy to your life. And it'll also please the Lord Jesus Christ. And then we can go out of here without any weights and we can change this city and change this world through the power of Jesus Christ. Amen? Amen. Let's just give the Lord

"LIVING A LIFE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE"

JOEL OSTEEN #VL_004 - 3/12/00

OPENING: The only thing that matters starts today! At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. Join us this Sunday. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you! (Applause)

DODIE: Amen. We're glad you've joined us today. And I know you're going to be blessed. So don't turn your television off. I have a scripture that'll be good. One of them I use all the time. Our people know it well. But this one is good. I added one on to it. In Psalm 32, it says, "My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day." Did your strength ever evaporate like that? Did it feel like you couldn't get up in the morning? Or when you were going through something? You just couldn't make it because your strength is wasted every morning - because your strength has just evaporated. Well listen to what 110 Psalm, number 3, says, "And your strength shall be renewed day by day like morning dew." (Applause) If you're tired, if your strength has evaporated; remember, it shall be renewed day by day like dew, morning dew. There's always dew. No matter what day,--seven days, through every day of the year there's always dew so your strength will be renewed. Thank God for that. (Applause)

JOEL: We are so glad to have everybody here at Lakewood Church. I know I tell you every week the same thing. But we love you. I want you to know our family loves you and we appreciate you. And we know God's got great things in store for you. And He's a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him.

Those of you watching by television, it's always an honor to come into your home. And I do it every week. I want to invite you to come out and be with us some time. We'd love to have the opportunity to meet you personally. So, if you don't have a home church or maybe you live in another city and you're going to be visiting the area, come by and see and us at Lakewood. We'd love to have you, wouldn't we? Let's give them a great big Lakewood welcome. (Applause)

Before we get started today, let me read you one of my funny e-mails. A man was walking along the California beach in deep prayer to the Lord. And God spoke to him and said, Son, you've been faithful to me and I am well pleased. Therefore, I'm going to grant you one wish. The man was overjoyed and he said, Lord, I've always wanted to go to Hawaii. But I'm deathly afraid of flying and I get seasick on boats. So would you please build a bridge so I can drive to Hawaii? The Lord laughed and said, That's impossible. Think of the logistics of that. How would the supports ever reach the bottom? Think of how much concrete and steel that would take. I'm very disappointed that your request is so materialistic. Take some time and wish again. The man thought about it for a long time. And he finally said, Lord, I've been married and divorced four times. My wives all say that I'm so insensitive. So my wish is that I could understand women. I want to know how they feel inside and what they're thinking when they give me the silent treatment. I want to know what they really mean when they say 'nothing'. I want to know what makes them cry. Lord, I

want to know how to truly make them happy. There was a long pause and God said, Do you want two lanes or four lanes on that road? (Laughter/Applause) Hold up your Bibles and let's say it like you mean it now. Louder than ever.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you. Open your Bibles, please, to First Corinthians, chapter 13. I always count it great joy and an honor to have the opportunity to share with you. And in this 13th chapter of the book of Corinthians, the Apostle Paul describes in great detail many of the qualities and characteristics of God's love. We don't have time to read the whole chapter but he talks about love is patient and kind; it's not proud and boastful and on and on and on.

But I simply want to focus on one little phrase from verse 7 that's found in the Amplified version. It simply says, "Love believes the best in every person." One translation says, "Love overlooks a person's faults." And I want to challenge all of you today to just make up your mind to live a life of unconditional love. We've got to be quick to show God's mercy. Psalm 18:25 says, "The Lord is merciful to those who show mercy."

See, we should not be hard and critical and judgmental toward other people. Love sees the best in everybody. And every one of you, if you look hard enough and long enough, you can find something positive in every person you know. You can even find some good in your worst enemies. Love overlooks a person's faults.

But have you noticed how human nature is to point out each other's faults. Then we start to talk about them, start to criticize them. Really it just leads to gossip. And what we allow to come out of our mouths is so important. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." With your own words, you can build people up or you can tear people down. And many times, when people make a mistake in life, the church world in general just says, "Hey, let them have it. They deserve it. Give them their rightfully deserved punishment. They're guilty." You know our natural flesh says, "Yeah, that's right. They need to learn their lesson."

But friends, this type of attitude goes directly against the nature of our God. When Jesus was here on this earth, everywhere He went, He reached out with His incredible love and mercy and compassion. And He always lifted people. He encouraged them. He built them up. He always saw the best in people.

And one of the greatest examples of God's love and mercy is found in John, chapter 8. All of you know the story. Jesus was at the temple teaching one day. And these religious leaders burst in there and threw a lady down right in front of Him. And they

said with great joy, "Jesus, we caught this woman in the very act of adultery. She is guilty and the law of Moses says that we should take her out right now and stone her. What do you think we should do, Jesus? What's your verdict? Surely, you're not going to disagree with what Moses said." And Jesus did something very significant. I'd never really seen this before. The Bible says that "He stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger and He ignored them". The King James version says that He acted as though it never happened. He acted "as though He never heard them".

And see, friends, this is a very powerful lesson to understand. I believe the Holy Spirit was saying that when we are critical and when we are negative and when we are judgmental and condemning toward other people, God will just ignore us as well. God won't pay any attention to us when we act that way. God is not pleased when we run around pointing out each other's faults. He doesn't jump on the band wagon and say, Oh, thank you so much for bringing to my attention what a lousy, rotten guy that guy is. No friends, when we are negative and critical, He just looks the other way. He doesn't want to hear that garbage. He doesn't listen to it. That's not why He put us here on this earth. And time is too late and the hour is too late for any of us to waste even one second of our precious valuable time just criticizing and pointing out somebody else's faults.

And many of you may wonder why some of your prayers are not being answered. I challenge you to constantly check up on yourselves. Make sure that you're living a life of unconditional love. Make sure that you're looking for the best in everybody. See, Jesus said in Matthew 7:3, "Get the log out of your own eye before you try to get the speck out of your brother's eye." The Amplified even makes it more powerful. He said, "How can you possibly see the tiny particle in your brother's eye when you've got a beam of timber in your own eye?"

See the Holy Spirit was saying so powerfully, just concentrate on yourself. Just examine your own heart. Just make sure that you're keeping yourself pure and don't worry about somebody else's faults. Don't look for them. Overlook their faults and see the best in them. And see, we've got to all give people a little room to be the people that God's called them to be. Don't fence people in.

See, I realized a long time ago if everybody in this world were just like me, this world would be a very boring place. And just because somebody doesn't comb their hair like me or dress like me or have my sense of humor, it doesn't make them wrong-(Laughter) I don't know. Whatever. It doesn't make them wrong-Why is that funny? (Laughter) The first crowd didn't laugh at it.

Anyway just because they don't look like me and were my same type of clothing, it doesn't make them wrong and me right. It just, you know, God just made us different. We're all individuals. We're all uniquely made. Some people they don't like to wear a suit and tie to church. But big deal. There's no place in the bible that tells you exactly what to wear when you come to church. And the main thing is God just wants you to wear something. (Laughter) This is not the Garden of Eden. Don't come in here looking like Adam and Eve. But one of the biggest mistakes we make is to be critical of our differences. We should learn to appreciate the variety that God made. And we've got to be extremely careful, especially as Spirit-filled Christians that we don't look down on or criticize somebody else just because they don't worship exactly like we worship. Maybe they don't take communion like us. Maybe they don't baptize like us. Maybe they don't believe every single thing we believe. Well, big

deal. That doesn't make them second class in God's eyes. We all have a tremendous amount to learn. And we should never have this 'know-it-all' attitude or 'better than you' attitude just because our church maybe is a little bigger than theirs or just because we flow a little more or a little less in the gifts of the Spirit.

See, I was questioning God one day about all these difference in our churches today. I've been in churches that are very, very conservative. They're a little stiff for my taste. Then I've been in some that are really wild and crazy. Sort of like a tent revival every service. One day, I prayed. I said, Lord, which one is right? And God spoke to me so strongly. He said, Joel, they are both right. He said, I have purposely, by my divine will, raised up a variety of churches so that they can reach a variety of people all over the world.

And see friends, it is not our-Amen. (Applause) See, it is not our place to run around judging and being critical of how God leads somebody else to worship. Years ago, I went to a spirit-filled Catholic service and I promise you I've never felt the presence of God so strong in all my life. My attitude is I'm for everybody that's exalting and uplifting and magnifying the name of Jesus. (Applause)

And they may not worship exactly like we do, but the main thing is if they believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven and that He's the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, then whether we like it or not, we are on the same team. And you say, Joel, but they're doing a lot of wrong, they've got a lot of faults. Well, listen friends, let God deal with it. God's a big God. He's well able to take care of them. Well, Joel, what about all their false doctrine. Well, friends, I say it in all due respect, what about your false doctrine? I dare say that there's a person alive today that interprets every single scripture in this Bible one hundred percent accurately.

And our calling in life is not to run around 90 miles per hour and try to straighten out everybody doctrinally or try to point out all their faults. We should not concentrate on what we don't agree on. We should concentrate on what we do agree on. And see, most of the time, isn't it amazing that we let the little two to five percent that we don't see perfectly eye to eye on, we let that stop us from enjoying fellowship with each other for years and years and years. And isn't that pitiful? Life is too short to live that way.

I love the attitude my dad used to have. He said, if you draw a circle and shut me out; I'm going to draw a bigger circle and shut you in. See, we've got to learn to be inclusive and not exclusive. And the Bible says in Hebrews 3:13, "Exhort one another daily." That word "exhort" means to uplift, strengthen, and encourage. And if you're allowing anything other than uplifting, positive, faith-filled encouraging words to come out of your mouth about another individual or about another church, I can promise you it is not pleasing to the Lord and it will hinder you in your walk with the Lord.

The Bible says in First Peter 3:10, "If you want a happy, good life, keep control of your tongue, and guard your lips from telling lies." Nothing does more damage in the Body of Christ and nothing separates life-long friendships any quicker than spreading rumors, telling lies, and gossiping about people. And friends, there's no excuse you can come up with to try to justify telling something about another person that is going to harm them. Whether it's true or not, it doesn't matter. Even if it is true, that's no excuse. Love overlooks a person's faults. Love sees the best in everybody.

See, most of all of us agree that it's wrong to gossip and say negative, critical things about people. But did you realize that it is just as wrong to even listen to gossip. Because when you do that, all you're doing is encouraging that person to continue to spread that garbage. Somebody calls you on the phone and says, Man, I've got some news hot off the press. It's the latest, greatest, juicy details. You've got to meet me after work, girlfriend. (Laughter) Have I got some news for you! No, listen friends, you know, you're over there salivating. You can't wait till 5 o'clock to come. But you have no business being a part of that. As a matter of fact, you have a responsibility to try to stop that junk. The Bible says in Proverbs 11:13, "A gossip goes around spreading rumors, while a trustworthy man tries to quiet them."

One of the best things you can do if somebody is spreading gossip and lies and criticizing people around you is try to stop it even before it gets started. Say, hey wait a minute, let's just take a moment and pray for that person instead of making fun of them and pointing out how bad and how messed up they are. Look, if you're going to live a life of love, you've got to be on the offensive. You've got to stop that junk before it gets started. You shouldn't be quick to point out other people's faults. You ought to remember Jesus just looks the other way.

All these religious leaders had thrown that woman down, caught in the act of adultery, and Jesus just continued to ignore them. In John, chapter 8, verse 7, it says that they kept on in their accusations. They kept on questioning Jesus about what they were to do with her. And finally, Jesus got so fed up with them and he looked at them and said, "Listen, you that are without sin, you go ahead and throw the first stone." And see, Jesus clearly gave us the requirements for having the right to be judgmental and critical toward other people. He said, it's okay to criticize somebody provided you meet this one simple requirement. And that requirement is that you have never once sinned yourself.

See, I can't speak for you, but I can tell you with great confidence, that takes me out of the stone throwing business. And all these religious leaders, they began to leave one by one from the oldest to the youngest. And now the only one that was left with that lady was the very one that had every right in the world to condemn her and to throw the first stone. He was the Son of God who knew no sin. But that's not even the nature of our God. He just simply looked at her and said, Woman, where are all your accusers? Hasn't anybody condemned you? And she no doubt looked up for the first time, looked all around, and much to her surprise, all these religious hypocrites were gone. And she said, in a broken quiet voice, Lord, no man's accused me. No man's condemning me now. And Jesus looked at her through His incredible eyes of love and mercy and compassion and He said, Hey, neither do I condemn you. Go and just don't sin anymore.

Jesus is such a tremendous example for us to follow. Our God is so full of mercy. He is so kind and so compassionate. He always see the best in people. He sees your potential. He overlooks your faults. He knows you're just human. He knows you're going to make mistakes. But the good news today is God is not in the condemning, criticizing business. He's in the loving business. God is love. And friends, when you show love, you are sharing God.

Notice Jesus, He didn't berate that woman. He didn't chew her out. He didn't tell her she was on her way to hell. He simply loved her. And love never fails.

You say, Joel, she was wrong. She was living in sin. She was guilty. But friends, only the guilty need mercy. And the next time you're tempted to be hard and judgmental and critical toward somebody that's made a mistake, you always think about where you would be without the love and mercy of God. We would all be on our way to hell. See, when you're hard and judgmental and critical toward people, all you're really doing is planting bad seeds. And one day, you've got to know you're eventually going to reap what you plant.

I remember growing up we knew this minister. He was so strongly opposed to divorce. And don't get me wrong. I'm 100% against divorce. But this man, I mean he was so negative and critical and judgmental towards people that had been divorced. If you got a divorce, you might as well just, he just wrote you off. You were basically finished as far as he was concerned. But one day, something happened that totally changed his mind about divorce. Unfortunately, his own son went through a very long, drawn-out bitter divorce. And as you might imagine, his opinion and his view on divorce radically and drastically changed. He publicly apologized. And he started a new ministry to help heal the hurts and pains of divorced people.

See, when you are unwilling to show mercy, when you are unwilling to show God's love, when you are unwilling to forgive people, you burn the bridge that you very well one day may need to travel yourself. And see, I'd be very hesitant, I'd be very careful not to criticize anybody until I first walked in their shoes. You don't know what they've gone through in life. You don't know what hardships and what pain and what rejection and what trauma they may have endured. All you can see is the surface. You don't really know what environment they were raised in. You don't know what hurts they may have so wrongly suffered. And it's so easy in life. We see somebody that makes a mistake and we just point at them and say, Man look at that. They're wrong. They're guilty. They need to have what they-you know, they're getting the punishment they deserve. And yet we don't know anything about them. We just judge them so quick.

But friends, where is the love that overlooks a person's mistakes? Where is the love that encourages somebody to get back on the right path? Where is the compassion that puts your arms around somebody and loves them and hugs them and holds them and comforts them in their time of need? Where is the mercy that God so freely gave to us? Can't we extend a little to them. That's the least we could do.

See, one thing I loved about my dad was that he was a man of incredible, extraordinary love and compassion and mercy. He lived to encourage people. Ya'll all remember a few years back, several of these national ministries made some big mistakes, big misjudgments. They were wrong. They were guilty. And the whole world was letting them have it. The media was having a hey-day and the church world wasn't really too forgiving. But my dad, the true heart of my dad came out and my brother-in-law, Kevin, found this letter from my dad, hand-written letter to one of those ministers and I just wanted to share it with you today. I retyped it. Talking about showing the love of God. Written to one of those ministers. He said: Dodie and I and all of Lakewood put our arms of love around you through this telegram. Our Lord Jesus will see you through it all. His blood is sufficient for cleansing. His power is sufficient for lifting you up. His compassion and mercy are sufficient to give you another chance. His wisdom is sufficient to show you how to go in the future. Remember the bird with the broken wing will fly twice as high again.

Jesus, who is the Lilly of the valley stands with you in your valley and so do we. Your friend through the years and your friend in your darkest hour. John Osteen (Applause)

See, love overlooks faults. Love overlooks mistakes and love shows mercy. Jesus said in Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." And what we've got to realize in life is that at one time or another all of us are going to need God's mercy. I promise you. So we need to learn to be quick to show mercy to other people so that God will be quick to show mercy to us.

The Bible says in Galatians 6:1, "When a person falls into sin, you who are spiritual should restore him with all gentleness." One translation says to "quietly help him get back on track." Notice it doesn't say anything about being critical or judging him or condemning him. It talks about quietly getting him back on track.

I'm reminded of the story Norvel Hayes told about his daughter Zona. Most of ya'll know Norvel. He's a minister and long-time friend of our family. But when Zona was in her late teens, she was very, very rebellious. She wasn't serving the Lord. She was living a really wild, crazy life. She loved to party. She'd stay out all hours of the night and this was driving Norvel nuts. He constantly preached to her every day. He preached at her. He would chew her out. He quoted her scriptures that showed how wrong she was. He threatened her. He tried to scare her even into straightening up her life. But none of this worked. Nothing he ever said even phased her. And one day he would pray and he said, God, why don't you help me? When are you going to ever save my daughter? And God spoke to him and said, Son, I'm going to save Zona as soon as you start loving her. And Norvel was insulted. He said, What do you mean, God? You know I love her more than the whole world. He said, Son, if you love her, then quit preaching to her...quit chewing her out, quit harping on her and start showing her that you love her. He said from that moment on, he never said another negative thing to her. When she came in at all hours of the night, he was there with his arms held open wide to hug her and love her and tuck her into bed. The next morning when he got up, the first thing he did was take her a cup of coffee. He encouraged her. He did all these kind things to her. He treated her like a queen. And you know, it was just no time until Zona totally and completely changed and gave her life back to the Lord. See, love never fails. And what Norvel couldn't do in months and months and months by criticizing and condemning and chewing her out, he was able to accomplish in no time when he just started showing the love and mercy of God.

You will never go wrong living a live of unconditional love. You say, Yeah, Joel, but I got some people in my life that I can't stand. Man, they're-(laughter)-well, it's true. They're not serving the Lord. They don't treat me right. They're disrespectful. God surely doesn't expect me to love them and treat them good. But friends, Jesus said that we are to even love our enemies. He said if your enemy's thirsty, give him something to drink. He said if he's hungry, give him a Big Mac. (Laughter) Wake ya'll up. He said if he wants your shirt, go ahead and give him your coat. He said, by doing this, you will heap coals of fire on his head and the Lord will reward you.

I'll close with one final story. During the South Korean war, a Christian father was arrested by the communists and ordered to be killed. But when this young communist leader heard that this man was a head of an orphanage and he was taking care of all of the children in that area, he decided to spare his life and instead

kill his son. So they brought this man's teenage son out and right before his very eyes, they shot him at point blank range and executed this man.

Years later, the fortunes of war changed. And this same young communist leader was arrested and tried by the United Nations and sentenced to death for these horrible crimes. But before the sentence could be carried out, this same father whose son had been murdered by this man pleaded and pleaded with the courts to spare the life of this killer. He said he was too young. He didn't know what he was doing when he committed all those crimes. And he begged them. He said, Please just give him to me. Let me have him. I'll train him. I'll help him make something of his life. And strangely enough, the United Nations granted this man's unbelievable request. And he took the murderer of his own son into his own home and raised him and loved him and cared for him. And to make a long story short, that young communist, he gave his heart to the Lord. And now today, that former communist murderer is a spirit-filled pastor of a church in another nation. Love never fails. (Applause)

I challenge you again to let your lives overflow with God's love and God's mercy. Life is too short to get caught up in our petty differences. And these petty misunderstandings. No, give people the benefit of the doubt. Give them a little room to be the person God's called them to be. Nobody's perfect. Overlook their faults and let's be quick to see the best in everybody. And let's be quick to show God's mercy because we know we're going to need it one day. And my prayer is today that all of us from this day forth will make up our minds and determine in our hearts that we are going to live a life of unconditional love. How many of you are with me? Amen. Amen. (Applause)

"KEEPING THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE OF PROBLEMS"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #VL_005 - 3/26/00

OPENING: At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. Join us this Sunday. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you! (Applause)

DODIE: We are so glad you joined us today. And I think you're going to be blessed. Joel is going to preach a sermon that will really help you. It helped me a lot when I heard it in the first service and it'll probably get better this one. Let me tell you this. Psalm 103, the 17th and 18th verse. Listen to this. "But the loving kindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." Will you say that? Everlasting to everlasting (Everlasting to everlasting). That's a pretty long time. But listen to this. "To those who reverence him." I mean. Does that make us wonder? If you're not reverencing God, if things are not going good in your life, are you reverencing God? You might check it out. And you might find out if you start reverencing God, if you start revering Him, start fearing Him, not that He's a bad God, but that He's a God that loves you and helps you, then you'll be blessed from everlasting to everlasting. And all the people said Amen! (Amen) (Applause)

JOEL: Well, we do welcome all of you to Lakewood Church. We're so glad to have you here. I tell you every week, but we love you and we pray for you every single week. We know God's got great things in store for you. And those of you watching by television, we count it an honor to come into your home and we just always want to give you a personal invitation to come out here and see us. We would love to have you. I know you'll feel the love of God here and these people will make you feel at home. So come out whenever you can.

Before we get started today, I'll tell you one of my funny little e-mails. I think I can tell you the story as well as read it. There was this plane that was about to crash and there were five passengers left on board, but only four parachutes. So they began to discuss who should get the parachutes. The first passenger was Bill Clinton. He said, "I'm the President of the United States, the leader of 300 million people, I need a parachute. And so they gave him one. The second one was Al Gore. He said, "I'm the Vice President. And now I'm a Presidential Candidate and my country needs me." And so they gave him one. The next one was Hillary Clinton. She said, "I'm the first lady of the United States and I'm going to be a New York Senator. And I'm one of the smartest, most intelligent women in the world. I need one." And they gave her one. The fourth passenger was Pope John Paul. And he looked at the fifth passenger who was a ten year old Boy Scout. He said, "Son, I'm old and frail and my life is just about all used up. I'm going to sacrifice my life and give you this final parachute." That ten-year-old boy said, "That's okay, sir. There's still two parachutes left. The smartest woman in the world just jumped out with my backpack." (Laughter) All right, hold up your bibles. Let's say it like we mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do

what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless ya'll. Ya'll sound great. Open your Bibles to 2nd Corinthians 7, verse 5. The apostle Paul said, "For when we came to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings and within were fears." One translation says that, "every place we went, we had trouble and conflicts."

Nobody knew more about adversities and hardships than the apostle Paul. And one reason I believe that he faced such tremendous obstacles and he had such tremendous challenges in his life was because he was always doing so many great things for the Lord. I mean he wrote over half of the New Testament. No wonder the enemy was constantly fighting against him. And friends, I believe that God has called us here at Lakewood to do some unusual, exciting, extra-ordinary things for Him and for the Kingdom of God as well. So let's don't be too surprised if the enemy fights us harder than ever in these coming days.

See, you've got to know when you make small plans, you can expect small problems. When you've got a strong desire to do great things for the Lord, and you step out in faith, and you dream big dreams, you make big plans, then you can expect the enemy to fight you in a big way with big problems. That's why the apostle Paul said "Fight the good fight of faith". Life is a fight, if you're doing something for God.

I'd love to be able to stand up here and tell you if you serve God, you'll never have another problem. But friends, that's just wishful thinking. God never promised us that we'd have a problem-free life without any challenges. As a matter of fact, Jesus told us just the opposite. In John 16:33, he said, "In this life, you're going to have all kinds of trouble, hardships, trials, frustrations, but don't get discouraged. Don't let that get you down. Don't lose heart. Just always stay full of joy and keep your eyes upon me, for I have overcome the world. And I'm not going to allow it to harm you." (Applause)

See, problems don't have anything to do with how spiritual you are or how dedicated or even how committed you are. Problems are just a part of life. And everybody has to face them. Some people get a chip on their shoulder because they think they've been dealt an unfair hand in life. Maybe some of you today are facing great difficulties because of circumstances that were totally out of your control. You didn't have anything to do with it. It wasn't your fault. Maybe it's a life-threatening disease. Maybe your husband walked out on you. Or maybe your company was downsizing and all of a sudden they don't need you anymore. I don't know what it is, but all of us in life, either large or small, we face challenges.

And the important this is not really the problem, but it's how you respond to the problem that really matters. Problems responded to correctly in your life will advance you forward in your walk with the Lord. They'll make you stronger. They'll make you more mature. And eventually even large adversities and large obstacles will be very easy for you to overcome. God doesn't send the difficulties. He doesn't send the problem, but He will use any situation we face in life to mature us and to develop us and to draw us closer to Him. He will not waste any of your adversities. But He'll turn it around and He'll get some good out of it, if you let Him and if you keep the right attitude. And that's a very big 'if'.

The word problem comes from the Greek word, "Provelain", which means "to drive or throw forward". And one thing I can tell you for certain, problems never leave us the same. You'll either advance or you'll retreat. If you've got the right attitude, you'll come out stronger with a greater confidence in God and His Word. On the other hand, if you've got the wrong attitude, you'll come out weaker, less confident, and possibly even a little bit angry and bitter on the inside. But nobody stays the same after a problem. And only you can choose which road you're going to go down.

The best way to escape a problem is to solve it. Deal with it. So many times in life, we try to ignore the problem, sweep it under the rug, deny that it exists. But unfortunately, 99% of the time, problems just don't automatically disappear because we ignore them. Most of the time, they get significantly worse. And failing to deal with things in your life that you know aren't right, you know aren't pleasing to God, it's only going to cause you much more pain and heartache in the future. And it is not the size of the problem that's really important, it is your perspective of the size of the problem that will greatly determine your success or failure in dealing with that problem. What is your perspective of the problem or problems that you're facing today?

The other day I was all dressed up and I was on my way out of the house headed for this important reception that I was going to go to. My little 16-month old daughter heard me leaving. She came up gave me a great big hug, gave me a big kiss, and she kind of rubbed her face into my shoulder and padded me on the back. And all I could think about is "what a sweet little loving precious little girl that the Lord gave me." And I hugged her and I went on to my meeting. Little did I realize that little Alexandra had just eaten a red Popsicle. I don't know if your baby's like mine, but only about half of what she eats makes it into her mouth. The other half is either on the floor or her hands or her face. Unfortunately this day, it was all now on my suit coat. I quickly realized she wasn't loving me at all. She was wiping her face on me.

But it wasn't till I made it to this reception that a friend informed me that I had this big old mess on my shoulder there. Talking about the perspective of your problem. There was nothing I could do about it. I was already there. And this was an important event with a lot of influential people. And in my mind I stuck out like a sore thumb. I just knew everybody was laughing at me and making fun of me. And I'm sure they were saying, "Who let this kid in there?" You know, couldn't he at least clean his clothes or something? You know, it was so magnified in my mind. I promise you, I tried to cover it up by itching my shoulder 95% of the time. If I wasn't itching this way, I was itching this way. I'm sure those people thought I had the seven-year itch.

But the reality of it was it was nothing. The room wasn't very brightly lit. You know,

most people wouldn't even notice if I hadn't drawn more attention to it. Besides, people I meet, they don't notice my clothes; they're too awestruck by my awesome good looks. (Laughter)

Okay. I don't know why I say such corny things. But it was my perspective of the problem that it was so much bigger in my mind than it really was. Listen, you're laughing but you do the same thing. I'd been back in these offices before service before and I hear this loud scream. And I think surely somebody has had a heart attack. And I go running out of the office to see what's wrong. And there's my sister, Lisa, with her hands up in the air. And she says, "Oh no, I've got a runner in my hose." I look down and it's about a half-inch long. Most of ya'll sit so far back, you could never even see it.

It's not the size of the problem that's important. It is your perspective of the size of the problem. I know that's real comical and light. But let's put it in a more serious vein. The right perspective is that the problems we face in life are indeed solvable. The wrong perspective is that the problems we're facing are just too big, too difficult. They're unsolvable. You say, "Joel, my marriage is just too far gone; too much water under the bridge; we can't ever love each other again. We're headed for divorce." Wrong perspective. The wrong perspective is to say, "Joel, I'm just so deep in debt, I can't even see bottom. I guess I just make God mad sometimes. He's never going to help me out of this."

But friends, listen, the right perspective always maintains a positive attitude of faith regardless of the circumstances. The right perspective says, "With God, all things are possible". And I'm coming out of this mess in the name of Jesus. There is "no weapon that is formed against me that is going to prosper" and this thing has come to pass, it hasn't come to stay."

The right perspective agrees with God's Word. And the Bible says in Psalms 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers us out of them all." Are you facing big problems today? Are you facing seemingly impossible circumstances? Does it seem like the whole world has come against you and you just can't see any way out? Then friend, you need to agree with Psalm 118, starting with verse 10. The Psalmist said, "Though all the nations of the world attack me, and even though they surround me and swarm me like bees; even though they blaze up against me like a roaring flame. Yet will I march out behind God's banner and God will protect me and God will help me to overcome. You did your best to kill me, O my enemy, but the Lord has helped me. He is my strength and song in the heat of battle, and now he has given me the victory."

See, friends, the right perspective of the problems we face in life is to maintain an attitude that says, "I don't care what I face in life, I know no matter how hopeless or no matter how impossible it may seem in the natural, I have a God that is well able to see me through. He is the Great I Am. He has everything I need. And if He doesn't have it, then He can create it. He created the whole universe." See, you've got to develop an unshakable confidence in God. You've got to be fully convinced that there is nothing too hard for our God. You've got to know that you know that you know that He loves you with an everlasting love. And He's personally concerned about every one of you. He knows your needs before you ask. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows your words before you speak them. He's planned every day of your life before you were even ever born.

The right perspective is that the problems we face in life are temporary. They're not going to last forever. They came to pass. The wrong perspective is that the problems we face are permanent. "I'm never going to get out of this mess." See, that just leads to despair and frustration. The right perspective is that every person in life faces problems and that's just a part of life. You've got to deal with it. The wrong perspective is "I'm being singled out. I'm being cheated. Life's not treating me fair. I'm a victim." Listen, problems can make you better or they can make you bitter. Problems can challenge us or they can control us. Problems can stretch us or they can stop us. And I want to say it again, it's not the size of the problem, it is your perspective of the size of the problem. With the wrong perspective, you will let the smallest, most insignificant obstacle keep you in defeat for an entire lifetime. But with the right perspective, you will defeat and overcome some of the most incredible obstacles that you never dreamed possible.

And you should view each challenge that you face in life as a God given opportunity to grow and advance in your walk with the Lord. Let those adversities and hardships drive you to a deeper understanding of who God really is. Let them drive you to a greater depth and maturity in your faith. Peter talked about how when your faith is tested and tried in the furnace of affliction, it will come out as pure gold and it will bring much praise and honor and glory to God. Your trial is a test of your faith. And untested faith has very little value. But faith that has been tested and tried in the furnace of affliction is one of the most precious possessions a person can ever have.

And remember, challenges never leave us the same. And don't you dare get negative and bitter and start blaming God or blaming other people. If you do that, you're playing right in to the enemy's hands. That's exactly what he wants you to do. You've got to make it backfire on him. Use those adversities as stepping stones to get you closer to God. I love what Lester Sumrall said. He said, "I use every experience in life, as an opportunity to draw me closer to Christ." You can easily determine the caliber of a person by how much opposition it takes to discourage him. And God is looking for people in these last days that have a "never say die" attitude. People that are strong willed and determined. People that are resilient. People that have a made up mind that nothing's going to hinder them in their walk with the Lord. And that's all of you. And that's me, I believe.

I want you to listen closely to this next part of the message. If you take what I say here out of context, it'll seem to contradict everything I just said. So give me the benefit of the doubt here. A problem is something you can do something about. If you can't do anything about it, it is not a problem, it is a fact of life and you need to learn how to deal with it. This is so important to understand because it keeps so many people in bondage. I met a woman just the other day. She had not been out in public for over 15 years because she was so upset that her mom passed away. She said, "Joel, my mom and I were best friends. We did everything together. We were so close. And ever since she's passed away, I just haven't been the same person. I can't seem to go on with my life. I miss her so badly. If I could just have her back."

And, of course, I felt sorry for the lady and I explained to her though, no matter how hard she prays, no matter how much she fasted, no matter how much she begged God and cried, her mom wasn't going to come back. And I said, Ma'am, you're trying to fix something that you think is a problem. But it's really not a problem, it's a fact of life. And you just got to learn how to deal with it. The real problem here ma'am," I told her, "is not the death of your mom. But it's you refusing to deal with the grief and sorrow and loneliness."

And see friends, you have to know the difference between a problem and a fact of life. If you don't, you can end up wasting valuable years of your life. And there's nothing Satan loves any more than to keep God's people so deceived that they won't go on with their lives. Friends, the past is the past. You can't change the past. You just got to keep going forward knowing that God's got great things in store for you in the future.

See, when daddy died, we didn't throw up our hands and say, "Oh God, why us? Why me? How are we ever going to make it? What are we ever going to do?" No, we simply realized the fact that daddy had finished his course. He had accomplished God's purpose for his life. Now, it's a new day. And God's got new and exciting things for us if we'll just keep pressing forward.

See, I know people that have been believing God for their marriage to be restored for 10 or 15 years. And I don't say this critically in one sense whatsoever. But, you know, their ex-husband or ex-wife is happily remarried and going on with their lives. But they're over here hanging on and just believing God and praying that somehow He's going to work a miracle and change everything around and bring them back together. But friends, you can't unscramble eggs. And God-(Applause) God will not change a person's will. He won't make somebody do something. If He did that, He'd make us all get saved.

But see friends, God has given each of us, He created us with the ability to make our own decisions. And I know the Holy Spirit can move on us and convict us toward salvation. I'm not saying God can't put so much pressure on people or influence a person so much that they will want to serve Him. Because certainly He can do that. But what I'm saying is God always leaves the ultimate decision up to the individual person. The Bible even says, "I set before you life and death, you make the choice, choose life."

And I know some of you here today, maybe this is kind of touchy because you are believing God that your mate, your husband or wife, will come back to you. I wouldn't say anything in five million years to discourage. I simply want to strongly encourage you to seek God's wisdom and guidance concerning this matter. Because see friends, only you can make the determination as to when something is a problem versus a fact of life. I don't really believe deep down in my heart, and I'm not the expert on this, God is, but I don't believe God's best plan for your life is to wait around two, three, five, ten, twenty years hoping that that mate will come back to you one day.

See friend, one day you've got to realize it's changed from a problem to a fact of life. You've just got to deal with it and go on with your life. Otherwise, you're going to allow Satan to keep you in defeat and misery for your whole lifetime. See and if you ask me to pray for you, I'm going to pray that God is going to send somebody so fantastic into your life, somebody with such a great personality, somebody so good-looking that they'll sweep you off your feet and you won't even remember what that old goat looked like that walked out on you. (Applause)

But I want to make it real clear. Now, I'm not talking about believing God for your friends and family members to come to know-to come into the kingdom of God. That's a totally different story. Don't you ever give up on them. We know what God's Word says about people getting saved. The Bible says in 2nd Peter 3:9-I always

want to call it Timothy. The Bible says in 2nd Timothy that God-I must not be getting enough sleep or something. 2nd Peter 3:9, "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Don't ever give up on people that you know that aren't born again. That's not what I'm talking about.

But there is a difference between a problem and a fact of life. Think about this. Maybe you got passed over for that promotion at work that you've been hoping to get for years and years and years. Now, you know, you were working hard, spending extra time, and they looked past you. Now, all of a sudden it's gone. And human nature is to get in there and fight for it and give them a piece of your mind. And if we can't change it, then most of the time we get all sour and bent out of shape and we constantly think about how bad life was treating us and how unfairly we were treated and how ripped off we were. But friends what you really ought to do is just give that situation to God. Quit dwelling on it. Quit thinking about it. Listen, it's not a problem anymore, it's a fact of life. You didn't get the promotion. Now go on with your life.

See, don't sit back and say, "Oh, God, nothing good ever happens to me." No, the right perspective is, "God I know that I deserved that promotion. God I know that I was unfairly treated. God I know that I was ripped off. But Your Word says in Psalm 37:23 that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord". And God you know that I've done my best to faithfully serve You. So, I rest assured that you are in complete control of my life and you are guiding and directing every single one of my steps. And even though I cannot see the reason right now in the natural, I am fully confident that you have something much better in store for me in the future. (Applause)

See, Proverbs 3:5 says that "If you put God first, he will direct and crown your efforts with success." You can say, God I know Your Word says in Isaiah 55 that "your ways are not my ways, they are much bigger and higher and better than mine. So God, you can see the big picture for my life. You know what's best for me at all times. So I refuse to get angry. I refuse to get bitter. I refuse to blame anybody. God, I just give it all to you. And I let it go."

See, I'm convinced many times we're trying to hang on to things and fix what we think are problems, but they're really not problems. They're just part of life. We need to deal with it and then we need to go on knowing that God's got greater things in store for us. The Bible says in Romans 8:28 "all things work together for good to them that love the Lord." All things work together for good. None of us will ever understand why we have to go through certain things in life. We can't explain why we go through various trials and hardships. But the longer I live, the more I'm convinced you shouldn't try to figure it all out. Quit dissecting the situation. Quit over analyzing the situation and trying to find out whose fault it is. My goodness friends, 2nd Corinthians 4:4 says that Satan is "the god of this world." And as long as we live here, we are going to have obstacles to overcome.

And my challenge to all of you today is to just keep the right perspective of the problem. There is no situation you're facing that is too difficult for our God. When you go through these adversities and hardships, you always remember God is well able to see you through. The Bible says He is a "very tested and well-proven help in the time of trouble." Let those adversities draw you closer to God. We have an

immovable rock that we can run to. When everybody else lets you down, God will be there right by your side. (Applause)

In your darkest night, when you feel the weakest and it looks the most hopeless and you feel so lonely, then your loving Heavenly Father is close as the very breath that you breathe. All you got to do is call out to Him. David said in Psalm 18, "The sorrows of death encompassed me, and the pains or the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. But in my distress, I called out to the Lord and he heard my voice and He reached down from heaven and brought me out of my great trial. He rescued me from the deep waters. He delivered me from a strong enemy. And now he has turned my darkness into light. Now in His strength I can march out and attack any troop and scale any wall because he has given me the victory in every single battle!" Isn't that good? (Applause)

And see friends, God wants to do the same thing for you. I know some of you are so surrounded by incredible problems. Your life may be a big mess. You don't see how you can get out of it. Listen, friends, quit looking at your present day circumstances and get your eyes on your all-powerful, Almighty Creator of the universe. Quit talking to God about how big your problems are and start talking to your problems about how big your God is. (Applause)

The Bible says, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of God will raise up a standard." You don't have to do it. God's Spirit will do it. Just put your faith in Him. And call out to Him and He will meet you right where you are. He is no respecter of persons. Jesus said, "If you believe, all things are possible." And I want all of you to go out here today knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that no problem that you face is bigger than our God. And just like David said, in your darkest moment, God's light is going to burst forth and He's going to make a way where there is no way. And He's going to bring you through triumphantly and victoriously for His glory. Amen? Amen. Let's give the Lord a hand clap would you? (Applause)

"LIVING A LIFE OF EXCELLENCE"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #VL_006 - 4/9/00

OPENING: The only thing that matters starts today! At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. And this moment can determine your destiny. Join us this Sunday. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!

DODIE: (Applause) Amen! We are so glad to have you watch us today. And I have one little phrase out of the scripture in the 31st Psalm, in the 23rd verse. One little phrase. I want you to listen to this. "God protects all those who are loyal to Him." Now if you want protection, then you be loyal to God. And He has promised that He will protect you. And all the people said Amen! (Amen) (Applause)

JOEL: Well, we sure are glad to have all of you here today. We welcome you to Lakewood and just thank God that you choose to worship here. And we want you to know we love you and we believe that God's got great things in store for each and every one of your lives. Those of you watching by television, we always count it an honor to come into your home. And we trust if you ever get the opportunity that you'll come out here and see us at Lakewood. We'd love to have you and we promise you we'll make you feel welcome. And you will feel God's love and His presence out here.

Before we get started today, I'll share with you one of my e-mails that somebody sent me. One of these funny e-mails. A single man and a beautiful single woman were involved in an automobile accident that totaled out both of their cars. And the woman was at fault. But amazingly enough neither one of them was hurt. So the woman and man got out and they were talking. The woman said, "Man, this is just a miracle. We could have both been killed. God spared our lives. It must have been, you know, His destiny that we should meet and have a friendship for the rest of our lives." And this guy was just so gung ho. He was agreeing 100%. And she walked over to her car and she said, "Look, here's another sign from God." She had this big bottle of wine in the back of her car. And she said, "My car is demolished. But it wasn't even broken." She said, "I think we should drink this in celebration that God has spared our lives." That guy was so excited about the thought of this new friendship. He drank nearly the whole bottle of wine. And then he gave it back to her and she quickly put the top back on it and gave it back to him. And he was kind of puzzled. He said, "Aren't you going to have some?" She said, "No, I'm just waiting for the police to arrive." (Laughter)

That's just like a woman isn't it? Hold up your Bibles and let's say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to

receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you! Ya'll sound good. Open your Bibles to 2nd Timothy, chapter 2. I always count it a real joy and honor to share with you each week. It's a real privilege to stand up here. And we've been talking a lot lately about living a life of excellence for our God.

The Bible says in Hebrews that "Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain". And God was pleased. Brother Copeland shared last week, if you were here, on how Daniel had an excellent spirit. Now there were choices that these people made. They weren't born any more holy or any more godly than you and me. They were just ordinary people that chose to give God their best. They refused to compromise and get sucked in to the society that they were living in. They had determined in their heart that they were going to stand up strong and stand out in the crowd. They had a made-up mind that they were going to serve God with their whole heart and with enthusiasm.

And see friends, it's no different today. You and I make choices every single day that determine whether or not we're going to live a life of excellence for God. See nobody can make you stay out of sin. Nobody can make you stay out of compromising, questionable situations. No other person is constantly watching you 24 hours a day to make sure that you do right. Only you can make that decision to go all out for God. Only you can make that choice to get rid of the things in your life that you know aren't pleasing to God.

See, you shouldn't try to see how close you can get to this world and still stay saved. That's the wrong attitude. You've got to try to see how far away you can get from this world and how close you can get to God. Pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ should be your number one priority in life. And if you've got to ask yourself the question, "I wonder if it's okay if I do this?" "I wonder if the Lord would be please if I go to this place or if I hung out with this person?" Listen friends, the very fact that you're having to ask yourself that question is a real good indication that it's probably not a good idea and it's going to end up being a compromising situation.

Life is a series of choices. God gave each of us the ability to make our own decisions. If you're going to live a life of excellence for God, then you've got to concentrate on making wise godly choices that bring honor to the name of Jesus and not shame or disappointment. And the Bible says here in 2nd Timothy chapter 2, verse 20, "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold or silver, but also of wood and clay; some for honor and some for dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself, he shall be a vessel unto honor, made holy and useful for the master's service and prepared for every good work."

See there's something you have to do. It doesn't just happen automatically. You've got to purge yourself or cleanse yourself. The Bible says in Corinthians, "Let each man examine himself". You should constantly evaluate your life and make sure that you're not making decisions and choices that are hindering your walk with the Lord.

The Bible says in Hebrews to lay aside all that junk; "lay aside the weights and the sin that does so easily get you off course." David cried out, "Lord, point out anything in my life that makes you sad." See, if we're going to expect to be used for God's highest purposes, then we've got to do our part and cleanse ourselves and concentrate on making wise godly decisions throughout life. Every major decision you face, you should ask yourself the question, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" "How would He respond?" "What type of attitude would He have?" Every place you go, especially when you're not real sure you should go there, you should ask yourself, "Would I be comfortable bringing the Lord Jesus Christ with me into this place?" After all, He lives on the inside of you.

The Bible says there in 1st Corinthians 3, verse 16, "Don't you understand that you yourselves are the temple of God and that the Spirit of the most High God lives on the inside of you?" This is a tremendous thing to really comprehend. See friends, God doesn't live in holy buildings or in holy temples or in the Ark of the Covenant like He used to. When Jesus died and was buried and rose again, God moved out of man-made temples and He moved into the hearts and lives of His children. He lives on the inside of you. And every place you go, you take God with you. Is He pleased?

Notice what the Amplified version says in verse 17: "If anyone does hurt to God's temple and corrupts it or destroys it, God will do hurt to him and bring him the corruption of death and destroy him. For the temple of God is holy and sacred and you are that temple." God charges each one of us to take care of this temple and to keep it holy. Each one of us has the responsibility to make wise choices throughout life so that we will live a pure and honorable life before God. Ephesians 4:30 says, "Don't cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live." 1st Peter 1:16, God said, "Be ye holy, even as I am holy." And see, friends, I say this often, but the hour is too late to be living a half-hearted, lazy indifferent compromising Christian life. Satan is at work in this earth today, I believe stronger than any time ever in history. He knows his time is very, very limited. So he's pulling out all of the stops and unfortunately, he's being very successful in deceiving a whole lot of people. He's infiltrated every area of society and every aspect of society. You can go home this afternoon, flip on the TV. It's filled with all kinds of sex, violence, ungodly immoral lifestyles. Hollywood tells you it's okay to play around on your mate, it's okay to lie, cheat and steal and crush other people just as long as you get what you want out of life. Go buy a magazine, flip through the radio dial or surf the Internet. You've got to pass through all this filth and trash before you find anything good. The philosophy of most people today is "if it feels good, do it, you only live once, make the most of it."

Well friends, this society has sunk really to an all time low. When pornography is viewed as freedom of expression, something is wrong. When our children aren't allowed to pray in school, yet they've got to go through metal detectors to get in, something is really wrong isn't it? (Applause)

When we spend more money and more time and energy to save the animals than we do to save other people, something's wrong. And see, the Bible is seen by most people as old fashioned, irrelevant, and outdated. But do you know what's happened? Satan has slowly and carefully deceived each generation more and more and more. And now there's a whole group of people that don't even know the difference between what's right and what's wrong. No wonder they make terrible choices. And this is what the Bible said would happen.

2nd Corinthians 4:4 says: "Satan blinds the minds of those who believe not." And one translation says, "So that they will not be able to discern the truth." And I hate to say it, but you probably agree that's the generation we're living in right now. We've lost our sense of value and unless we go back to the foundational principles in God's Word, we're never going to really know what truth is. And if you're going to live a life of excellence before God, you're going to have to base every decision you make on God's Word.

See, I read a survey where researcher, George Barna, found that in spite of all the filth and violence on television, the TV viewing habits of Christian people is exactly the same as non-Christians. And see friends that ought not to be so. There out to be a difference in the choice that you make and the choice that unbelievers make. Jesus said, "you're in this world, but you shouldn't be of this world." Whoever is a friend of this world is the enemy of God.

The Bible says in 1st John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." He lists three things. "For the lust of the flesh". That's adultery, fornication, playing around on your mate. "The lust of your eyes". Greed, an insatiable desire to gain everything, gain material things. And number three, "The pride of life". Look how great I am. Look what I've accomplished. Look how talented I am. The Bible says all that junk, that's not from God but that's from this world. And if you're going to live a life of excellence, then you cannot allow yourself to get sucked into this world's system and start thinking like this world and acting like this world and living like this world. Satan will lie to you and say, "Come on, man, it's the year 2000. Lighten up a little. You only live once. Don't be such a stick in the mud. It's okay to cheat on your wife a little. She's not going to know. What she doesn't know is not going to hurt her." Listen friends, that's Satan doing what he does best. Trying to deceive God's people into compromising and making very poor choices that lead to all kinds of heartache and sorrow.

You will never live a life of excellence listening to Satan's lies. You say, "Oh, Joel, but everybody's doing it. Even my good Christian friends. They smoke a little of this. And we party a little here and there." But listen friends, just because everybody else is doing it doesn't make it right. Don't be so deceived. (Applause)

The Bible never says that the majority rules. God didn't create a democracy. See He laid down His laws once and for all. And He said it's so simple. It's so easy. If you follow my commands, then you'll live an overcoming, victorious Christian life. But if you're hard headed and you're stubborn and you've got to do it your own way and you refuse to obey me, then you're going to constantly experience misery and pain and all kinds of defeat.

And see, you should not base any decision that you make in life on how somebody else acts or what somebody else does or what somebody else says. You shouldn't get your eyes on any other person no matter how good, holy, or spiritual they may seem to you. Because I promise you sooner or later, they're going to let you down. They're going to disappoint you. We're all human. We can all make mistakes.

I know it's good to have good positive Christian role models, but sooner or later, ultimately, you've got to base your decisions on what God's Word says and not on what any other person says or does. And see, young people, this especially important to you, it's important to everybody. But just because someone you love

and respect and admire is doing questionable things in their life and is living a compromising life, don't let the enemy deceive you into thinking that that makes it okay for you to do the same thing. No. Every person has got to stand on his own two feet. God made us all individuals. You have the mind of Christ. You are made in the image of God. You've got His Spirit on the inside of you. Every one of you can feel that uneasiness deep down on the inside when something's not right. You've got to be sensitive and recognize that's God talking to you. And you've got to be quick to make wise decisions to correct that problem. The Holy Spirit is like an alarm clock on the inside of us. When something is not right, that alarm will sound and disturb us to correct that situation. Maybe it's a new friend that's moved into town. Every time you hang out with him, you just feel a little bit uneasy. You can't quite put your finger on what's bothering you. Friends, that's the Spirit of God trying to alert you to the fact that there's danger up ahead and you need to stay far away from that relationship.

See God speaks to every single one of His children. And He wants to guide you and help you make the right choices throughout life. But many time we don't recognize how He speaks and we feel that uneasiness. But we just push it down and choose to ignore it. A couple of days later, that same alarm goes off. We feel uneasy. But once again, we choose to push it down and ignore it. But the Bible says to let the peace of God rule your heart. One translation says, "act as an umpire, call you safe or out."

And see, finally, we push that alarm down so much, it becomes so common and so routine we can't even hear it anymore. It's not that God's not talking to us. God is faithful. He always does His part. It's just the fact that we're either so hard-headed or so busy or we want to do it our own way so bad that we choose not to listen to it. God does want to help you. I promise you He wants to help you make the right decisions. The Bible even says in Proverbs 2:6, "The Lord grants wisdom. He gives good sense to the godly. He is a shield guarding them and protecting their pathway. He knows how to distinguish right from wrong and to make the right decision every single time."

God wants to help you make the right choices throughout your lifetime. But you've got to do your part and be sensitive to that still small voice on the inside of you. And then you've got to be quick to obey. Most of the time, God's not going to come up and hit you with a ball bat to get your attention and say, "Hey big fella, there's danger up ahead." No. You've got to be still and recognize that still small voice.

See every person here, every person listening, has the ability and you have the opportunity to live a life of excellence for God. But it all depends upon the choices you make throughout life. You are who you are today and you are where you are today because of the choices you've made in the past.

One of the biggest mistakes we make is to blame other people and to make excuses for the way we've been living. You say, "Oh Joel, my husband-he just won't come to church. He's not interested in the things of God. He makes fun of it all. He'll never serve God". Well, friend, you can pray for him and believe God that he'll change. But whatever you do, don't let him keep you out of church. Don't use him as an excuse to keep you from serving God. (Applause)

Don't let anybody else's influence drive your soul to hell. See, when you stand before Almighty God to give an account of what you've done with your life, God's not going

to call your whole family in there all together. It's not going to be a group session. Young people, you can't bring your best friend. You can't say, God, wait a minute, let me get my business partner. He's the one that had the idea to do all the cheating. It's not my fault, God. Listen friends, there's not going to be any finger-pointing in heaven. It's just between you and God as to what kind of life you've lived and what kind of decisions you've made.

The Bible clearly says that every person will have to stand alone before the Creator of the Universe. And you're going to have to look God dead in the eye and answer to Him for the things you've done in this life, whether good or bad. And don't think you can lie to God. I know some of you think about that. He knows what you're thinking before you even speak it.

And listen, every major decision you make in life should be made with this fact in mind. Hey, God, one day I'm going to stand before you. Is this pleasing to you? Is this decision, is this route that I'm going, is that going to be pleasing to you? Live in the light of eternity.

I know some of you today are facing major decisions. And maybe you're trying to decide, should I compromise and take the easy way out? Even though it's a little bit questionable and it's a little bit shady? Or should I stand strong and make the right choice? Should I do the right thing and go the way that I know beyond a shadow of a doubt will be pleasing to the Lord? Let me encourage you. Always take the high road. You'll never be disappointed. It may not be the easiest path, but God will always reward you for doing what's right. Nothing takes the place of living a life of integrity. And see our lives here on this earth are so short. James said, "Our lives are but a mist, we're here for a moment, and then we evaporate and we're gone." The Bible says in heaven one day is like a thousand years here on this earth. If you calculate that out using an 80-year life span, that means our lives here on this earth represent less than 2 hours as far as God is concerned.

And if I challenged all of you to go out of here today and live a holy, godly life, make good decisions for the next two hours, every single one of you would do that. Well friends, that's the same type of attitude you need to have throughout life, knowing how God calculates and views our time down here on this earth.

And I'm here today to challenge you and to stir you up and fire you up a little bit to strive for excellence in your walk with the Lord. Quit making excuses and blaming other people. Start taking responsibility for your own actions and for your own decisions. See nobody is forcing you to live an ungodly life. Nobody is twisting your arm to keep you out of church and to keep you from serving God. Nobody's making you live with that man or woman you're not married to. Nobody's forcing you to be dishonest in your business dealings. No, these are all choices that you're making.

And what I want to encourage you with is to choose to live a holy, godly consecrated life. Make a quality decision to live a life of integrity and honesty before the Lord. See, you can jump, shout, and read your bible 24 hours a day. But if you're refusing to pay your honest debts, you can't expect God to bless you. You can't live a life of excellence that's pleasing to God and cheat people at the same time. You shouldn't buy things on credit with no intention of paying them back.

See there's a lot of things in life that we can do and get by with as far as God is concerned. We can lie and cheat and repent. And if you really know the Lord, you're still going to go to heaven. You can commit adultery and repent and you're still going to go to heaven. You can live a half-hearted Christian life and repent and ask God to forgive you and you'll still go to heaven. But God is looking for a group of people in these last days that want to do more than just barely make it to heaven by the skin of their teeth. Amen? (Applause)

God is looking for a group of people that more than anything else have a strong and sincere desire to please Him in every single area of their lives. God's looking for people of the utmost integrity. People that will go overboard to do what's right. God's looking for a people that will live a life of honor.

And see too many people today, and I don't think it's any of ya'll. I honestly tell you that. But too many people today are just Sunday Christians. They come in churches with their Bible and notebook and they. You know, shout in all the right places. They sing the loudest. They say Amen at the right places. They're fired up for the Lord on Sundays. But you know what? Monday morning is a different story. They live like the devil. It's like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. They're two-faced. They talk the talk but they don't walk the walk.

And see friends, our actions speak much louder than our words. We can come in here and jump and shout and do somersaults and cartwheels for the Lord on Sundays. But the true test comes on Monday through Saturday. Do our lives truly reflect God's presence and bring Him glory and honor? Do we pay our bills? Do we treat our mates right? Do we let filthy language come out of our mouth? Are we dishonest in our business dealings?

See, these are choices that every one of us faces all throughout life. And they determine whether or not we're going to live a life of excellence for God. And you've got to remember, I said it earlier, Satan's working overtime on the earth today. He wants your life. We are all constantly being bombarded by all these negative, ungodly forces that are trying to influence us to compromise and shrink back and just give in and live like the rest of the world. Come on, man! Everybody else is doing it. Just do it with us.

Listen, here's what's happening friends, Satan is doing his best to infiltrate your mind and convince you and deceive you into making poor, poor choices that will lead you to defeat and misery. And friends, if you're not grounded in God's Word. If you don't know who you are in Christ. If you don't know your authority over the devil and demon forces. If you are not sober and vigilant and serious about your relationship to God, unfortunately, you're not going to have a chance. There's no way you're going to be able to live an overcoming, victorious Christian life. If you don't know what you believe, you're just lazy and indifferent. Friends, you're falling right into the enemy's trap. And you're going to be easily deceived and easily confused and you will allow Satan to take you down a course that is far, far, far less than God's best plan for your life. The powers of the enemy are real. And they are strongly at work in the earth today.

But the good news to all of you is the power of God is real also. And God is pouring out of His Spirit today. I believe He's pouring out His Spirit on his children in a greater measure today than ever before. And we have entered into a whole new

dimension where God is going to do unusual, extraordinary things for the people that are totally and completely sold out to Him. In these last days, the supernatural is going to become the natural for the people that have consecrated themselves to God and are striving for excellence in their walk with Him. God is simply looking for somebody that won't compromise. And somebody that won't live like the rest of the world. God's looking for people that are so full of integrity that they'll go the extra mile to do what's right so there won't even be a question of any wrong doing.

God is raising up an army of people that have a burning desire more than anything else to offer their lives as a holy, acceptable, well-pleasing sacrifice to God.

I read where John Wesley said, "Give me a hundred men that fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God and I will change this world." Friends, think about what all of us can do together if we'll all get on fire for the Lord.

And see, it is my prayer today that not a person in here, I don't care who you are, if you just drifted in here, maybe you've never even been to church. But it is my prayer that not a person in here will be deceived into living a compromising life of mediocrity. But that you will stir yourselves up. And rise above the filth and trash of this world. And choose to live a life of excellence and honor and integrity before our God.

Let me encourage you to press on and reach for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Go that extra mile that's to do what's right. Stand out in the crowd. Stay out of those questionable areas. Don't get involved in anything that might bring shame or dishonor or disappointment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Always be still and recognize that still small voice on the inside of you and then be quick to obey. Purify yourself. Cleanse yourself. Live a holy, godly consecrated life. And you know what? When you do that, just like the scripture said, you will be a vessel of honor fit and ready to be used for God's highest purposes. And then one day when you stand before Almighty God to give an account of what you've done with your life, I believe you won't even have to answer because God will say to you, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant". Amen? Let's give the Lord a hand clap. (Applause)

"GUARDING YOUR THOUGHTS"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #VL_007 - 4-30-00

OPENING: The only thing that matters, starts today! At Lakewood Church, we believe in new beginnings. Lakewood is a place of unlimited possibilities. Where your need is our greatest concern. Your life is full of potential. This moment can determine your destiny. Join us this Sunday. At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you! (APPLAUSE)

DODIE: Praise the Lord! We're glad you've joined us today. And I want to share this scripture with you in Psalm 27. The Living Bible says in the third verse: "Yes, though a mighty army marches against me, my heart shall know no fear. I am confident that God will save me."

Thank God. No matter what comes against us, we will have no fear in our hearts because we are confident that God will answer our prayers. Thank the Lord! Yes! (Applause)

JOEL: Well, we do welcome all of you to Lakewood Church. We're just so glad to have you here. We tell you each week but we love you. We believe in you. We pray for you. We know God is "a rewarder of those that diligently seek him" He's going to reward you for being here today. You can know that.

And those of you watching by television, we feel like you're a part of our extended family and we just always like to take the time to give you a personal invitation to come out and see us whenever you possibly can. We know you'll feel the love of God and the presence of God. And we'd just love to have the opportunity to personally meet you. Wouldn't we love to have them come out and see us? Give them a handclap, would you? (APPLAUSE)

I wanted to share with you a funny letter I got from an 86-year-old woman in another state. And she's something else. Listen to this.

Joel, don't ever forget about us old folks. We are worth a fortune. We have silver in our hair, gold in our teeth, stones in our kidneys, lead in our feet, and gas in our stomachs. She says, I've become quite a frivolous old gal since I wrote you last. As a matter of fact, I'm seeing five different gentlemen every day. When I get up, Will power gets me out of bed. Then I immediately go see John. A few minutes later, Charley horse comes along. When he leaves, Arthritis shows up. And finally, I'm so tired, I go to bed with Ben-Gay. (APPLAUSE)

I told the first service I'm going to invite her down sometime and let her testify. She's got to be something else. Anyway, hold up your bibles and we'll get started today. We're so glad to have you here. Say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my bible. (This is my bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly

confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Say it like you mean it. Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless ya'll. Ya'll sound great. Open your Bibles, if you would, to Isaiah 26. We're going to read verse 3 in just a moment.

I want to talk to you a little while today about the importance of guarding your mind and controlling your thought life. Your mind plays a tremendously important role in your walk of faith. See, when you got born again. When you made Jesus the Lord of your life, the Holy Spirit infuses the life of God into your Spirit man, your inside man, and you were changed. The Bible says, "we become new creatures in Christ Jesus".

But it is so important for us to understand that although God totally makes our inside man completely brand new, he doesn't do anything to our physical bodies or to our minds. He leaves both of those areas up to us to take care of. And Satan's favorite area to work in is in the area of your mind. He cannot touch your Spirit man once you're born again.

The Bible says, "you're in the palm of God's hand and no man can snatch you away". But he can deceive you in the mental area if you allow him to. Jesus called Satan in John 8:44, the "father of lies and all that is false". And I can't think of any area that keeps more people in bondage than this area of our thought life. Satan specializes in worry, fear, anxiety, confusion, and doubt. He is a master deceiver and he knows that he can control and manipulate our whole lives by simply affecting the way we think.

Your mind is the bulls' eye of Satan's target. The only entrance Satan has into your personality, your emotions, into your thoughts is through your mind. But fortunately, friend, you control that ever important doorway. The only access the enemy has in your life is the access you allow him to have. That's why the Bible says in Ephesians 4:27, "Give no place to the devil". Don't give him any place in your mind or in your thoughts. You've got to be very selective and very cautious about what you choose to think about. You've got to take control of your life by standing guard over your thought life.

The Bible says in Proverbs 3:27, "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." You will eventually become what you think. And you can't think one thing and become something else. If you allow yourself to think negative worried, fearful thoughts, then you will become a negative, worried, fearful person. You cannot think defeat and expect victory. You can't think poverty, and expect wealth. You can't think the worst, and expect the best. Friends, it doesn't work that way.

You've got to think about what you're thinking about. Take regular inventory of your thought life. You've got to be extremely careful and extremely aware about what you allow your mind to think about. And what you choose to dwell on. Satan would love to keep you living a life of defeat by causing you to think thoughts of worry and

anxiety and fear. He knows if he can keep our minds all cluttered and confused, we will never be the person God wants us to be.

But God gives us a tremendous promise here in Isaiah 26:3. It's very simple. Yet it's really profound...it's really powerful. God said, "I will keep you in perfect peace if you keep your mind stayed on me." Notice there is something that we all have to do if we're going to experience perfect peace. And that is we've got to control our thought life. We've got to guard our minds. We've got to think on the things of God. But friends, this is not going to happen just automatically. This has got to be a decision you continually make throughout life.

See, we live in a very negative society. This culture focuses on what's wrong and not what's right. What's missing and not what we have. What's ugly, not what's beautiful. Pick up a newspaper today or go watch the news tonight and see if the major focus isn't on the negative. Every one of us are going to have plenty of opportunities to dwell on the wrong things. Satan is constantly bombarding our thoughts, our minds with ungodly negative thoughts that are trying to confuse us and distract our attention away from the things of God. He is doing his best to slowly and very cunningly infiltrate your mind and bring thoughts of fear and uncertainty about the future. Satan specializes in fear. Fear of not having our needs met. Fear of not being accepted. Fear of failure. Fear of not living a healthy life. And this fear that he brings creates anxiety, worry, doubt, unbelief, confusion. But listen to me closely friends. None of these negative thoughts-none of these fears will come into reality unless you first believe them and then begin to act on them.

Fear is a force just like faith is a force. If you give into fear and start to dwell on that junk and start to act on it, that fear can actually bring things to pass just like faith can bring things to pass. Job said, "the thing I greatly feared came upon me." And see friends, you and I choose every single day what we're going to think about, whether good or bad. And if we let ourselves, we can all think of a thousand negative things that might happen to us. What if my business goes down? What if I have an accident? What if my child gets on drugs? What if? You can what if...friends, you can worry yourself silly if you want to.

Some of you think, you know, Joel, that's just the way I am. Mom and Dad used to worry. Grandma and Grandpa used to worry. They were all negative people. Our whole family always worries. We're professional worriers. That's just the way God made me.

No friends, with all due respect, that's a lie. Worrying is a choice. And you've got to rise up today in the name of Jesus and just break that habit. And refuse to listen to Satan's lies. And you've got to refuse to let your mind dwell on that junk.

The Bible tells us what we should dwell on in Philippians 4:8. It's to "think on things that are pure and honest and of a good report." Things that build you up, not tear you down. Think on all the great things God has done for you, the bible says. In other words, you've got to dwell on the positive and not the negative. Quit thinking about what you don't have and start thinking about what you do have. Quit thinking about what's wrong with you and start thinking about what's right with you. Quit thinking about how big your problem is and start dwelling on the fact of how big your God is.

See, we've got to learn to live a grateful life and we've got to always focus on the positive and not the negative. See, friends, if you're continually thinking about the goodness of God, you're not going to have any time to worry and complain and get down and discouraged. If you're always meditating on God's promises, then you're always going to be filled with a good report. The words that come out of your mouth are going to be faith-filled words. You're not going to be up one day and down two days. No, you're going to be consistent. You're going to be solid because it's not going to matter what your circumstances do. It only matters what God's Word says.

See, friends, in life, situations and circumstances are constantly changing. But thank God the good news is we serve a God that never changes. He is consistently good. He is there all the time. He'll never leave us nor forsake us. He's the solid rock. And the promises in His Word will never pass away.

But see, Satan is trying to distract our attention away from the things of God. Satan wants to keep you so busy trying to figure out how in the world you're ever going to get out of your mess that you get so worried and so bumfuzzled and so confused, you just want to give up.

And friends, if all you do is watch the news 24 hours a day, you're going to have plenty to worry about. All you do is fill your mind with the trash of this world, it's going to be real easy to get down and discouraged. If all your faith is in a certain business or in the stock market, and that's all you constantly think about, then friend, don't be too surprised if your mind gets troubled and filled with fear and anxiety.

But if you just choose to keep your mind stayed on the things of God, you're not going to really care what the economy does. You're not going to really care what the stock market does because you're dwelling on the fact that God said in Philippians 4:19, "he is going to supply all of your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." It doesn't really matter what man does or what the economy does. Friends, God can still rain down bread from heaven to take care of us like He did the children of Israel. God has not lost the recipe for manna.

When Peter needed money to pay his taxes, Jesus said, No big deal Peter. Just go down to the lake and go fishing. Sure enough, the first fish he caught, it had enough money to pay both his and the Lord's taxes.

And see friends, you don't have anything to worry about. God can take care of you. He has not gotten weak. God has not become tired and old and grumpy. He is still well able and extremely willing to meet every need that you have. (APPLAUSE)

God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His saints. And it's time for us to quit thinking so small and let's start dwelling on what an awesome God we serve. He is the all-powerful Creator of this universe. He spoke the worlds into existence. Don't you think He can take care of you and me?

See, when He said, "Let there be light", light came at 186 thousand miles per second. Don't you think He can get your child off of drugs? Don't you think He can save your loved ones? Certainly He can.

He flung the stars into space. Don't you think he can restore your failing health? Certainly He can friends. You've just got to quit dwelling on how impossible and how hopeless your situation is. Start dwelling on the goodness of God and the promises of God. The Bible tells us there in Psalm, chapter 1, verse 1: "Blessed is the man that doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly." Verse 2. "But his delight is in the law of the Lord or in this Bible and in this Bible does he meditate day and night. And when he does this, "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. He brings forth fruit in his season. His leaf also shall not wither. But whatever he does shall prosper."

Notice friends, all this takes place when you begin to meditate and fill your mind with the promises of God's Word. Do you know what meditate means? It means to ponder, to imagine, to dwell on, to say the same thing over and over and over and over again in your mind.

What are you believing God for today? You've got to find the scriptures that apply to your situation and you've got to constantly think about them, imagine them, ponder them, replay them over and over in your mind all week long.

See, friends, this is how you keep your mind stayed on the things of God. And this is how you avoid worrying and being filled with fear and anxiety. The best defense is a good offense. If your mind is totally filled with the promises of God's Word, then when Satan comes to bring those negative thoughts and when he comes to try to get you to believe one of his lies, it's too late friends. Your mind is already full. There's no room for him. It is filled with the promises of God.

And see friends, when you begin to meditate on God's Word day and night, you will start to see yourself as God sees you. And this is so important because you will never live a life of victory until you first see yourself victorious. You will never get out of debt until you first see yourself out of debt. Your business will never be successful until you can see it's successful. You'll never get free from that mental torment until you see yourself free from that junk. That's why it's so important to meditate on God's Word.

Our thoughts create pictures in our imagination. And as you dwell on what God says about you, you'll start to see yourself in a whole new light. You'll start to see yourself prosperous and victorious and whole and healthy as an overcomer.

See, it's impossible to remain the same as long as you're meditating on God's word. You cannot stay in defeat and all depressed and discourage as long as you're filling your mind with the promises of God's Word. You will begin to develop a godly self-image and you will constantly be changed into the person God wants you to be.

There is a canvas on your heart. And every single day, your imagination is painting a picture of you based on what you're thinking. And every single day, that picture is being updated and adjusted throughout the day based upon what you're thinking. And if you allow yourself to give into worry and fear and anxiety and you let Satan's lies clutter your mind and confuse you, then friend, your imagination is going to paint that exact picture of you and you're going to see yourself as a defeated, depressed, loser in life.

I said it earlier, you can't live an overcoming victorious Christian life while you're thinking negative worried, fearful thoughts. It doesn't work that way. That's why I always encourage you to be serious about your relationship to God. The Bible says, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your enemy is out to destroy you."

Friends, you've got to know what this Bible says about you. If you don't, Satan will have a hay-day with your life. What does this Bible say about you? And you've got to find the scriptures that apply to your situation. You've got to stand on them. You've got to believe them. And you've got to meditate on them day and night.

Because see friends, it really doesn't matter what I say about you. It really doesn't matter what anybody else says about you. All that really counts is what does God say about you? What does God say about your situation today?

See, somebody may come up to you and say, Man, your son or daughter really got off track. Man, they're going down the wrong path. It doesn't look like they're ever going to straighten up and serve the Lord. Listen, friends, you can just smile and look at them and say, "Listen, with God all things are possible. And as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (APPLAUSE)

Somebody may come up to you and say, "Man are you still single? You must be really lonely. Are you ever going to get married?" You just smile and look at them with great confidence and say, "Listen, my steps are ordered by the Lord. Psalm 37:4 says, Because I delight myself in the Lord, He will give me the desires of my heart. So I don't have anything to worry about."

Somebody comes up to you today and says, "Man, you don't look very good. Are you feeling all right? Are you sure you shouldn't go home and go to bed?" Look, you look at them and just say, "Listen, by the stripes of Jesus I've already been healed. It doesn't matter what I look like, I'm coming out of this. This sickness didn't come to stay, it came to pass. And I'm coming out in the name of Jesus."

See, friends, you've got to have some promises to stand on. What does the Bible say about your situation? See, this takes a little bit of effort. Don't be lazy. Human nature—all of us, you know, we want the easy way out. We'll pray, God, hit me with your magic wand and fix all my problems. You know. You pray it too, don't you?

Listen, it took ten years to get in debt. You're going to have to stand on the promises of God and believe that He's going to bring you out. It may not happen overnight, but I guarantee you it will happen. All the promises of God are "yes and amen". God is not a man that He shall lie. If you're standing on one of His promises, you can count it as good as gold, God will bring it to pass. Amen?

In 1997, Victoria and I had the opportunity to build out the last full-powered television station here in town. Channel 55. God supernaturally brought this across our paths. And I knew it was something God wanted us to do. And I was really excited. But I really didn't have too much experience in this area. It was a tremendous undertaking. We were dealing with hundreds of thousands of dollars. We had to make critical decisions every single week. And I had plenty of opportunities to worry. Every expert I ever talked to tried to discourage us and tell us why it wasn't going to work. And tell us why it wasn't going to be successful. But friends, I refused to listen to the nay-sayers.

Listen friends, this is so important. If you make the mistake of meditating on what other people say to you, you will never reach your full potential in the things of God. It's so important to understand. Don't meditate on what anybody says about you. You find out what God says about you. Don't listen to the voice of discouragement.

And during that time-it took about a year to build-out the station-I'd remembered what my mother did and how she'd made a list of healing scriptures out of the bible when she was faced with cancer of the liver in 1981. And I decided to do the same thing. So every morning when I got up and read my Bible. I had me a legal pad. And I'd write down any scripture that had to do with success, guidance, or wisdom. And then every day before I'd leave the house, I'd read over those scriptures and just meditate on them and just dwell on them and get that into my mind and deep down on the inside of me. Man, it was like a shot of electricity. It only took five or ten minutes, maybe. But by the time I walked out of that house, I knew that there was nothing I couldn't do. I began to see that station successful and on the air and full of advertisers.

See, friends, when I'm talking about meditating, I don't mean you've got to spend three hours every morning. Just get you, even if it's one simple scripture, and just replay it over and over and over again in your mind all day long.

I know some of you right now are facing tremendous difficulties and you're struggling. And maybe it feels like the whole world has come against you. Well, friends, you've got to start to dwell on Isaiah 54:17 all week long. It says, "No weapon that is formed against you is going to prosper". When those negative thoughts come your way, you just reject them and you say, "No devil, you may have formed this weapon against me, but in the name of Jesus, God promises me--He guarantees-it is not going to prosper and in the end, I will overcome." See, the Bible says, "When you've done everything you know to do to just stand on the promises of God." Just dwell on the fact that you are more than a conqueror.

See, many times during that year it took to build out the station, things would go wrong. And it looked like it could have a domino effect and totally wipe us out and we wouldn't get the thing on the air in time. You know, I was real tempted to worry and get real depressed and despondent. But you know what? I'd always catch myself and I'd go back to my list of scriptures that I'd written down. And I'd start to meditate on scriptures like Proverbs 3:5. It says, "in everything you do, if you put God first, He will direct and crown your efforts with success." So, I'd just raise my hand and say, "Father, You know You're first in my life. You know this station is for your glory and not mine. So I just thank you Father that you are directing and crowning my efforts with success."

I began to meditate on the fact that God was in control. He was leading me. He was guiding me. He was directing my steps. Some days, I'd have to make a decision concerning hundreds of thousands of dollars. And I wasn't real sure which way to go. So I'd go back to my scriptures and I'd meditate on Proverbs 2:6. "The Lord grants wisdom and he gives good sense to the godly. He shows how to distinguish right from wrong and to make the right decision every time." And I just began to thank the Lord. "Father, thank you that I do have the mind of Christ. I'm filled with Your wisdom, Father. And I thank you, Father, You will help me to make this right decision. You are guiding and guarding my pathway."

Friends, God is so faithful. Ya'll know. We got 55, Channel 55, The Tube, up and on the air. It's doing, it's doing great. But the key not to worry is to keep your mind stayed on the things of God and then have some promises to stand on. You've got to have something to keep going in your mind. When the enemy comes against you, you need to be able to combat him with the Word of God.

Even now sometimes, the enemy will come against me. "Joel, you're not really qualified to pastor that church. Man, you don't have the ability." Listen, I don't even think about that. That scripture just rises up in me and says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (APPLAUSE)

See, the great thing to realize folks is we don't have to do it in our own strength and in our own ability. It is through the power of God that works in you and me that makes us well able to do everything God's called us to do.

When those negative thoughts come, there are three simple steps you need to take. All of you can remember these. The three R's. Number one. Recognize where those thoughts come from. God does not put thoughts of anxiety and fear and worry into your mind. They are from the enemy. And Satan is the father of lies. You can take just the opposite of what he tells you.

Number two. Reject that thought immediately. Don't even dwell on it for five seconds. The longer you think about it, the harder it's going to be to get rid of. Don't think, "Well, what if this does happen? What if that was true?" No, you've got to reject it immediately. Don't give Satan the time of day.

The third thing is the most critical. Replace that thought instantly with the Word of God. Rejecting and recognizing are not enough. If you don't replace that thought immediately, Satan will come back to you again and again and again. And he'll bombard you. And he'll finally wear you down until you will accept one of his lies. You've got to instantly replace that thought with the Word of God. And then you've got to start to meditate on God's Word. Just think about that promise.

Do you know what worry is? It's simply meditating on what the enemy says. When you give in to worry, you're just playing Satan's lies over and over and over and over again in your mind. And see, friends, we're all going to think about something all day long. Why not choose to think about what God said about you? God says something so powerful in Joshua 1:8. "This book of the law, this Bible, shall not depart out of your eyes, but you shall meditate on it day and night. Then you shall make your way prosperous and you shall deal wisely and you shall have good success."

Notice it's when you begin to meditate on God's Word, when you begin to think on the promises of God, that wisdom and success and prosperity come.

So my challenge to all of you guys today is to think about what you're thinking about. Examine your thought life regularly. Do not allow Satan to deceive you into living a life of fear and anxiety and worry. Jesus said, "Which one of you can add one inch to your stature by worrying?" Nobody can, so don't waste your time doing it.

Remember the three R's: Recognize where the thought comes from. Reject that thought immediately. And Replace it with the Word of God. Learn to meditate on God's Word. Let me encourage all of you strongly to find at least one scripture this week that applies to your area of need and dwell on it all week long. If you have to, write yourself a note to remind you. You can put a note up on your refrigerator, on the mirror where you get dressed. Or maybe on your steering wheel. But just constantly replay that scripture over and over and over again. Just dwell on it. Magnify it. Imagine it. Ponder it. Friends, if you do that, you know what? It's going to be impossible to worry. It's going to be impossible to be filled with fear and anxiety. Do you know why? Your mind is renewed and it's stayed on the things of God. And God promises you, He guarantees you to keep you in perfect peace when you do that.

So let's be doers of the Word today. Not just hearers only. Don't say, Oh Joel, that was a good message. No friend, listen, don't let it go in one ear and out the other. You've got to make a quality decision today that you are going to refuse to worry anymore. You've got to refuse to listen to Satan's lies. And you're going to cast down those negative thoughts. And you're only going to fill your mind with good things, wholesome things, pure things. Not the junk of this world. Constantly meditate, imagine, think on the things of God and what He says about you. I guarantee you, you'll be well on your road to victory in the name of Jesus. Amen? Give the Lord a hand clap, would you? (APPLAUSE)

"DEVELOPING YOUR POTENTIAL"

JOEL OSTEEN SERMON #VL_008 - 1/7/01

OPENING: At Lakewood Church, we're here for you! We believe in new beginnings! We believe in you!

PASTOR JOEL: Well we do welcome all of you once again to Lakewood Church. I'll just tell you again from the bottom of my heart, we love you. Thank you for worshipping out here with us every week like you do. And those of you who are viewing on television, we count it a real honor to come into your home as well. And I trust if you ever get the opportunity, you'll come out here and let us meet you in person. I'd love to shake your hand just one on one. So we love you. Thank you for tuning in.

And I've got such a joy to have my little family with me today. I just wanted to introduce them to you on this first Sunday of the year. This is my best friend, little Jonathan. Five years old. He's the best boy in the world. I told the first crowd, he's almost as good-looking as me. Not quite. Jonathan's a good, good son. And I'm so proud of my little daughter. This is my little jewel, Alexandra. I love her with my whole heart. Hey, can you wave at them. Do you want to say anything? (No.) You don't want to. Oh, look at that. I don't blame you. I don't either. Anyway, I love my family. This is my beautiful wife, Victoria. Been married a whole lot of years. And we thank you all for being so faithful. I just wanted to show them off. That's the best part of me is them. So God bless you all. Would you all please leave? All right, hold your Bibles up and say it like you mean it.

CONFESSION: This is my Bible. (This is my Bible.) I am what it says I am. (I am what it says I am.) I have what it says I have. (I have what it says I have.) I can do what it says I can do. (I can do what it says I can do.) Today I will be taught the Word of God. (Today I will be taught the Word of God.) I boldly confess. (I boldly confess.) My mind is alert. (My mind is alert.) My heart is receptive. (My heart is receptive.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) I am about to receive (I am about to receive) the incorruptible, (the incorruptible,) indestructible (indestructible) ever-living (ever-living) seed (seed) of the Word of God. (of the Word of God.) I will never be the same. (I will never be the same.) Never. Never. Never. (Never. Never. Never.) I'll never be the same. (I'll never be the same.) In Jesus' name. (In Jesus' name.)

SERMON: God bless you all. You sound great. I want to talk to you today and for the next couple of months on how to be a leader in the Army of God. I believe God is raising up a new generation of leaders and I want to help you through these teachings to grow and mature into the person God really wants you to be. God doesn't want us to remain babies our whole lifetime. He wants every single one of us to grow into strong leaders in His army. And my desire is that Lakewood Church be a church of leaders.

And today I want to focus on developing your potential. If you're going to be a leader in God's army, you're going to have to know how to develop what God has put on the inside of you. Every person in here has undeveloped potential. Potential is

defined as existing in possibility but not in actuality, powerful but not in use. Do you know you have powerful things on the inside of you right now that are not in use? You have God-given gifts and talents that will lie dormant on the inside of you for an entire lifetime unless you step out in faith and begin to act on the dreams and desires God has put into your heart.

Potential cannot manifest without form. It has to have something to be poured into, something that causes it to take shape and become useful. Think of it like a concrete truck that's full of concrete. If it came up here and just dumped that load on this platform, it would be wasted. It'd be useless. It'd be a big mess. It has to have the forms to cause it to take shape and become useful. Well, what are the forms? The forms are the decisions that have been made about what the shape is going to look like.

In other words, you've got to have a plan. You've got to make some decisions. You've got to get involved. You've got to do something lest you do nothing. Your potential is not just going to magically appear out of nowhere. The Bible says, "We are workers together with God." You have got to do your part and act on the dream God put in your heart and then that potential will begin to develop and you'll discover talents that you never knew you had.

I never knew I could get up here and speak in front of people. Daddy tried for 17 years to get me up here, but I was scared to death. I told him, "Daddy, God hasn't given me those gifts. God didn't give me those talents. Those are your gifts. God wants me behind the scenes." But do you know the truth of the matter was those gifts and talents were on the inside of me all that time. I just never developed them. I never gave my potential something to be poured into. But when my dad went to be with the Lord, I acted on that desire. I stepped out in faith. I got out of my comfort zone. Sure, I didn't feel like I could do it in my own ability. I didn't feel like I was qualified. I didn't feel I had what it takes. But what you have to understand is if you will just dare take that first step of faith and act on that dream, then God will make a move and He'll give you more strength and more wisdom to do what He's called you to do so you can go to that next level.

God will never leave you hanging out there on a limb. When He sees you making an effort to do His will, then He will supernaturally empower you and equip you with every single thing you need to accomplish that task. The Holy Spirit is called our Helper. But if we never step out in faith and act on those God-given dreams and desires, we'll never need His help. And one of the favorite tricks of the enemy is to use the fear of failure to keep you from doing what God wants you to do. How many times in my own life have I not done something because I was afraid I might fail? I was afraid of what somebody might think about me. I was afraid I might be embarrassed. I was afraid I might be criticized. And see, Satan will feed you all these negative thoughts that are totally false to try to get you or keep you from moving off of dead center.

But friends, if we're going to grow up and be leaders in God's army and develop our potential, we are going to have to be willing to risk the possibility that we may fail every once in a while. Daddy used to say, "I'd rather shoot high and miss it a little bit than shoot low and make it." So what if you fail? God is going to pick you up. He's going to dust you off and put you right back on the right track. You cannot be so afraid that you're going to fail and you're going to miss God, and you're going to

disappoint God that you never attempt to do anything for God. You say, "Joel, what if I go down there to minister to the prisoners and then I can't think of anything to say?" Listen, God will give you something to say. When you come to the limit of what you can do, the Holy Spirit will immediately come to your aid to help you. Well, you say, "Joel, what if I pray for somebody and they don't get healed?" Well, what if you pray for somebody and they do get healed? You have got to be willing to take that risk.

I remember my dad used to tell about the time when he first received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit back in the late 1950's. He didn't know too much about healing. But as he studied his Bible, God began to reveal Himself as a Healer. As a matter of fact, it was during that time that God supernaturally healed my sister Lisa of that crippling birth injury. And daddy was so excited about this new truth that he had found in God's Word. He wanted to share it with people everywhere. So he decided he was going to step out in faith and have a citywide healing service. Now, you've got to understand this was a long time ago before praying for the sick was as accepted and popular as it is today. And so daddy took these ads out in the paper "Signs, wonders, and miracles: come receive yours today." And sure enough, the first night the building was packed. And daddy preached his heart out. He told them how Jesus was the same yesterday, today, and forever. He healed in Bible days and He'd heal today. Well, at the end of his message, he said, "Is there anybody here that might possibly want to come down and get prayed for tonight?" He thought maybe one or two would come. But much to his surprise, 99% of the audience got up to come down for prayer. The line for prayer went out the door and daddy was scared to death. He said, "I never dreamed they'd believe what I was speaking." He said, "Oh God, if You'll get me out of this mess, I promise to never do it again."

When everything settled down, they brought the first man up for prayer. And it was a very dramatic moment. He was on this big stage down there at the Pasadena High School auditorium. And they brought this man slowly across the stage. And daddy was shaking in his boots. He said, "Well, what's wrong with my brother?" And the man with him said, "Reverend Osteen, this man has never spoken a word in all of his life." And daddy nearly fainted. He said, "Oh God, couldn't I have started with arthritis?"

But see friends, what you've got to realize is when you take that step of faith, God is not going to leave you hanging out there on a limb. When you come to the limit of what you can do in your own ability, God will show up and help you do what you're not able to do on your own. To make a long story short, daddy prayed a simple prayer of faith over that man. God instantly, supernaturally healed him. He spoke the first words of his life that very night. But see, had daddy been so afraid of failure-(Applause)--Had daddy been so afraid that he may fail that he wouldn't step out in faith and get out of that comfort zone and develop those talents and that potential on the inside of him, none of that would have ever happened. And no doubt today some of you are letting the fear of failure keep you from being the person God wants you to be. Let me encourage you to take that step of faith. If you fall down, God is going to pick you up. If you miss it, God will reward you for at least trying.

I love what President Roosevelt said, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the great twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

Friends, you have more untapped potential on the inside of you than you can imagine. And if you will begin to develop this potential, God will show up and do greater things in your life than you ever thought possible. You were made for more than just getting up and going to work and coming home and getting up and doing it all over again and again for 50 or 60 years. God has something specific He wants you to accomplish to leave your mark on this generation. God is the great architect of the universe. And just as surely as He has drawn a specific plan for the sun and moon and planets so that the solar system will function properly, He has drawn a very specific plan for every one of your lives.

You must understand you are a person of destiny. You just didn't haphazardly appear on planet earth in January of 2001 because a little slime formed in a pond two billion years ago. The Bible says that God chose you to be here before the foundation of the world. God saw you before you were even formed in your mother's womb. You are not here by accident. You are here in God's divine plan. And He has strategically placed you here at this particular time in history because He has great confidence in you. He didn't choose David and Samuel and Moses to live in this hour. He chose you to live in this hour. He has more confidence in you than you have in yourself. He believes in you more than you believe in Him.

And my prayer is that you will feel this sense of purpose and make the most of every single day. Don't just drift through life with no sense of destiny. God is counting on you to make a difference and He has given you these incredible gifts and talents that must be developed. The enemy will tell you you're just a housewife; He's not talking to you. You're just a businessperson. You're just a plumber. You're just an accountant. No, listen friends; God has something for every single person to do. Don't ever listen to the enemy's lies. And your significance in God's army is not based on the significance that this society places on you. You may not have an "important title" but that has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with your position in God's army. Whether you are seen as important or unimportant does not matter. In God's eyes, we are all equal and God is not impressed by our titles.

Jesus chose fishermen and a tax collector and plain, old ordinary people to be His disciples and help carry out His will. And God has chosen every one of you as well. And when you were born, Almighty God placed a part of Himself into you. God has placed seeds of greatness in every one of His children. I don't mean we're all going to be famous. I simply mean God wants you to excel at what He's called you to do. If He's put the desire in you to be a teacher, then He wants you to be an outstanding teacher. If He's put the desire in you to build a business, then He wants you to build an outstanding business. If He put the desire in you to be an usher or to be a minister, He wants you to be the best usher or the best minister that we have. He wants you to excel. God is not a mediocre God. He's a God of excellence and He wants us to be people of excellence.

And you may not even realize it right now, but every one of you has God-given dreams and desires on the inside of you. That dream starts out as a little flame, just like a little flicker. And throughout life, you have to constantly add fuel to the fire to help it grow because the enemy is going to try to put out that flame. Some of you have gone through hard times and maybe you've failed God and made some mistakes and it seems like all of your dreams have died. But let me encourage you today, that little flame is still alive. The enemy cannot extinguish what God has started on the inside of you. All the forces of darkness cannot keep you from fulfilling

God's best plan for your life if you simply have the desire. Oh Satan will try to push that dream down and tell you it's not in there. But the good news is God has lit an eternal flame in every one of His children that no man can put out.

And that's why God tells us to stir up the gift that is within us. You've got to fan that flame. You've got to stay full of praise and thanksgiving. You've got to confess God's Word. You've got to act on that dream and you'll see that little flame grow into a mighty roaring fire. You've got to understand Satan does not want you to develop your potential. He doesn't like you hearing this message. He wants you to stay right where you are. He wants you to become lazy and indifferent. So he'll feed you lies like "You don't need to get involved. You're too busy. You're too important. You're too unimportant. Let somebody else do it. After all, they can probably do it better than you can." But see friends, those are all lies. You have unique gifts and talents like nobody else.

God made you an original. There's nobody in this world like you. You are one of a kind. And you know people right now that will never come into this church building and listen to me speak. They'll never hear my gifts. You know people that will never flip on a television and watch one of our services. The only way they're ever going to hear about God's love and compassion and forgiveness is if you do your part.

And no matter how good or bad I fulfill my race, I cannot fulfill your race. God's best plan will only be completed when every one of us rise up and get involved and do our part. And what I want to impress upon you today is God has a specific plan for your life that only you can fulfill. And you've got to constantly be stepping out in faith and developing that potential that God put on the inside of you. Now a lot of people tell me, "Joel, I don't know what it is God wants me to do." Listen, you've got to follow the desires that are deep down on the inside of you. Remember, God is the one that put them there. You may have a desire simply to go out and help the homeless. You may have a desire to sing in the choir or to build a business or to write a book or go visit people in the hospital. That desire is a God-given desire. And if you will act on it, it will propel you into God's best plan for your life.

Growing up, I always had the desire to be involved in television production. I loved working with the cameras and all the editing equipment. It was like a hobby to me. And I did it every chance I could get. And I always thought, "Well, this is just something fun that I like to do." But you know one day, I realized that God was the one that put that desire on the inside of me. That's when I called my dad and told him that I wanted to come home from college and start a television ministry here at Lakewood. See, if you'll follow your God-given dreams and desires, they will keep you in God's best plan for your life.

I was thinking about my brother, Paul. For 17 years, he was a successful surgeon out there in Little Rock. He had a great practice going. But when daddy went to be with the Lord, God put the desire in him and spoke to him about coming back here to Lakewood to help us. And Paul was obedient. He acted on that desire and now he's developing talents that he never knew he had. We're still trying to figure out what they are.

I'm not saying God is going to call you to change careers. But I am saying you've got to be obedient, you've got to be open to follow the God-given dreams and desires on the inside of you. So many people are waiting for a voice to boom out of the heavens

to instruct them what to do. But most of the time it's not going to happen like that. It's going to be a simple desire. The Bible talks about the still, small voice.

Some of you today are sitting around waiting for the right time to do what God's been telling you to do. You say as soon as my kids get out of school, I'll do it. I'll be obedient to God. I'll get involved. As soon as this big project at work gets over, then I'm going to get involved. Whenever the right time comes, then I'm going to do what God's calling me to do. But friends, you all know as well as I do, there will never be a right time. The time to do what God's telling you to do is right now. There is no better time to do it than right now. The hour is late. The time is short. And we've got to quit making excuses. Everyday you put it off, you're missing out on God's best.

And God's been dealing with some of you about giving your life totally to Him. You need to do it today. Today is the day of salvation. God's been dealing with some of you about getting your family and especially your children into church on a regular and consistent basis. You need to make that quality decision today. Don't put it off any longer.

Some people will never step out in faith because they've allowed the enemy to deceive them into thinking they don't have what it takes to do what God has called them to do. You say, "Joel, how can God ever use me? I have so few talents to give Him. I have so little to offer God." But friends, the key is to simply give God what you have. Do you realize God never once asks us to give Him something that we don't have? Simply give Him what you do have and He'll take the little and make much out of it.

Don't ever listen to the enemy's lies when he tells you "you don't have what it takes." Don't let him convince you to sit on the back burner and never do anything for God. Our God is a God of second chances. It doesn't matter how many mistakes you've made in life. God never disqualifies anybody. You're never too old. You're never too young. You're never too bad. You're never too good. It's never too late. It's never too early. Just put your life into His hands. Give God your talent whether they are little or much. Put it in His hands and watch what He can do with it.

I heard somebody put it this way. A basketball in my hands is worth about \$29. But a basketball in Michael Jordan's hands is worth about \$33 million dollars. It depends on whose hands it's in. A baseball in my hands is worth about \$7. But a baseball in Jeff Bagwell's hands is worth about \$8 million dollars. It depends on whose hands it's in. A rod in my hands will keep away a wild animal. But a rod in Moses' hands parted the Red Sea. It depends on whose hands it's in.

And if you will put your life and your trust and your hope and your confidence and your gifts and your talents into God's hands, you will never, ever be disappointed. He'll take you places that you've never dreamed of and make more out of your life than you ever thought possible. Every one of you in here has incredible amounts of undeveloped potential on the inside of you.

And my desire is to get you fired up so you'll begin to develop that potential and grow into the strong leader God wants you to be. Jesus told a parable in Matthew, chapter 25, about a man that was going off on a long journey. So he gave his three servants different amounts of talents to take care of. Now, a talent represented about \$1,000. To one he gave five; to another two; and to the third, he gave one.

Then he went on his journey. Well, immediately, the man with five talents went out and invested his money and gained five more. The man with two talents did the exact same thing. But the man with one talent was afraid. He was so scared, he went out and dug a hole and hid his talent in the ground. Well, after a little while, the owner came home and he wanted to settle up all of his accounts. So the man with five talents came in and said, "Master, you entrusted me with these five talents and I went out and worked hard and invested what you gave me and I gained five more talents. Here they are." The master said, "Well done. You've been faithful over little, now I'm going to give you even more. I'll make you ruler over much." The next man came in. He said, "Master, you entrusted me with these two talents. And I went out and did my best and gained two more. Here they are." The master said the same thing. "Well done. You've been faithful to use what I've given you wisely. Now I'll give you more." Finally, the third man came in. He said, "Master, you entrusted me with this one talent. And I knew you were such a hard man that I was so afraid that I might lose what you gave me that I hid my talent in the ground. I was so afraid to take any risks that all I have to offer you is this same one talent." The master said, "You lazy and wicked servant. You could have at least put the money in the bank so that it had drawn some type of interest. Take from him what he has and give to the man that has 10."

Friends, God has given every one of us talents. The Bible says they're all different according to our own ability. You may have five. You may have seven. You may have three. I may have six. You may have twenty. That's not important. All that matters is what you do with what God has given you. And so many times just like this last man, we're so afraid that we never step out in faith. We hide our talents in the ground. We're afraid of what somebody might think. We're afraid we might fail. We're afraid we might get criticized. We're afraid it might be too much work. Let me ask you a very important question today, what are you doing with the talents God has given you? Are you making the most of what God has entrusted you with? Or are there weights that are holding you back? Are you too busy to come to church on a regular basis? Are you letting the enemy deceive you into thinking you don't have what it takes to do what God's telling you to do?

Friends, on this first Sunday of the New Year, let me challenge you: Don't hide your talents in the ground anymore. We have got to grow up to become the leaders God wants us to be. You've got to stir yourselves up and step out in faith and do what God's been telling you to do. You are a person of destiny. And you will never be truly fulfilled compromising what God has put on the inside of you. Get in the race. Get involved. Act on the dreams and desires He's put in your heart. You have seeds of greatness on the inside of you. You have more to offer this world than you can imagine. Nobody can do what you can do. You have a race to run that only you can accomplish.

I believe we're living in a very historic and critical time in God's timetable. And He's counting on you and I to rise up and be leaders and to make a difference in this generation. Soon, we will all be giving an account to our Master as to what we've done with the talents He's entrusted us with. Let's make the most of the time. Be serious about your relationship to God. Stay focused on the things of God. Stay in church. Be faithful. Don't hide your talents anymore. Be quick to obey God. If you will dare step out in faith and act on the dreams and the desires that He's put in your heart, and begin to develop that talent and that potential that's on the inside of you, God will be pleased. And when it comes time to settle up your accounts with the

Master of the Universe, He'll look at you and say, "Well, done, thou good and faithful servant." Amen? Let's give the Lord a handclap, would you?