

What People Are Saying about Dr. Joseph Ripley and *Life to the Fullest...*

This book provides practical understanding that will annihilate once and for all the strongholds that attempt to permeate your life! It is God's will for you to be reconciled with Him and enjoy His presence. If you have met with obstacles when trying to avoid the words of those who contradict the promises of God for your life, make this book a part of your permanent library. Now is the time to break the insanity cycles that operate in your life by doing something different and expecting different results!

—Creflo Dollar

Founder and Senior Pastor, World Changers Church International

I encourage you to make *Life to the Fullest* part of your personal library. Through Dr. Ripley, God will show you how to change your thinking, how to get over excuses and overcome your past, and how, when you fail, He engineers a comeback on your behalf. Read it and reread it. Give a copy to your friends—saved and unsaved. Strike out against fear and walk in the fullness of a life lived deliberately and to the glory of God.

—Bishop Eddie L. Long

Pastor, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Lithonia, Georgia
Founder and CEO, New Birth Christian Academy
Author, It's Your Time and The Elect Lady

Sit down and enjoy yourself, because this is a good read. It will not only bless you and minister life to you, but it will also cause spiritual nutrition to come into your spirit, into your soul, and into your body. Enjoy *Life to the Fullest*. I sure did!

—Dr. Jesse Duplantis

Founder, Jesse Duplantis Ministries

In my life, I want to be the same kind of servant and love people the way that Dr. Joe Ripley and his wife, Marjanita, love me and other people. He has got to be one of God's chosen pastors, and I know that God is proud of him, his wife, and his family for the work they are doing for the Lord.

—Dr. Norvel Hayes

Founder and President, Norvel Hayes Ministries
Founder, New Life Bible College, Cleveland, Tennessee
Founder and President, New Life Maternity Home

This book will help you discover how to live the abundant life you have desired and that God has promised you in His Word. I encourage you to take the time to read these pages and let them inspire you to live each day as a champion for God.

—Reverend Kenneth W. Hagin
President, Kenneth Hagin Ministries
Senior Pastor, RHEMA Bible Church

Life to the Fullest may be the template you need to duplicate the model of wholeness he exemplifies in every arena. Now is a time when all of us need the wisdom he shares to have the abundant life the Scriptures promise the believer. If I were you, I would give it a read!

—Bishop T. D. Jakes
Senior Pastor, The Potter's House, Dallas, Texas

The principles and strategies in this book are life changing. If you desire to live your life to its fullest, read this book now.

—Bob Harrison
America's Increase Activist
Best-selling author

Pastor Ripley is truly a man of God. Over the last twenty-three years, he has been my friend, spiritual mentor, and a blessing to me and my family. Thank you for the dynamic and encouraging chapel services before my games. They gave me the strength to win. I know this book will inspire many to live *Life to the Fullest!*

—Kevin Willis
NBA Champion San Antonio Spurs
CEO, Walker & Willis Clothing

Dr. Ripley has been a loyal and constant supporter and life coach. His wisdom and insight have helped me overcome and triumph over many of the pressures and challenges professional athletes face. I strongly believe that everyone who reads this book, and purposes to incorporate in their lives the insights he shares, will be better for it!

—Ovie Mughelli
NFL Atlanta Falcons
Founder, The Ovie Mughelli Foundation

LIFE
to the
FULLEST

LIFE
to the
FULLEST

Soaring to Purposeful Living

DR. JOSEPH RIPLEY



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version, © 1979, 1980, 1982, 1984 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified® Bible, © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org) Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

LIFE TO THE FULLEST
Soaring to Purposeful Living

Dr. Joseph Ripley
The Body of Christ Church International, USA
P.O. Box 490346
College Park, Georgia 30349
www.bocciusa.com

ISBN: 978-1-60374-100-2
Printed in the United States of America
© 2009 by Joseph Ripley

Whitaker House
1030 Hunt Valley Circle
New Kensington, PA 15068
www.whitakerhouse.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ripley, Joseph, 1954–
Life to the fullest / by Joseph Ripley.
p. cm.

Summary: “Uses Scripture passages and biblical examples to teach Christians to see themselves the way God sees them—as overcomers—and equips them to defeat their fears, build courage, and live in victory”—Provided by publisher.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 978-1-60374-100-2 (trade pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Success—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4598.3.R56 2009
248.4—dc22

2008053912

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical—including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system—without permission in writing from the publisher. Please direct your inquiries to permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com.

Foreword

When I learned that Dr. Ripley was writing a book about changing wrong directions to right ones and bad circumstances to a point of victory, I was enthralled!

Anyone who knows me knows I am an advocate for change. Change is the inevitable component of fulfillment in our lives. It takes change in order to experience the fullness of God when we operate outside His will. My first thought was, *My God, Dr. Ripley is on to something!* This is not only a good word for such a time as this, it is a **now** Word, for real-life situations and people seeking real answers.

To the casual reader, this book may appear to be like any other self-help book. I assure you—it is not! One of the things that stood out for me was Dr. Ripley’s unique way of presenting how to use the power of your imagination to go from where you are now to where God wants you to be. No matter what your physical eyes may see, your spiritual eyes see the truth of God’s Word above mere facts that try to discredit it.

I know Dr. Ripley personally; in fact, as often as we can, we get together for lunch and fellowship. He is a true Word-seeker. Unlike many others, whose edification may come from one-day-per-week church attendance, Dr. Ripley lives, eats, and breathes the Word of God! I know him to be a high achiever, strong believer, and advocate for overcoming through God’s Word. We as believers are *predestined* to be overcomers. If there are areas of your life where you fall short, pick up a copy of this book right away and take advantage of the practical insights God provides through Dr. Ripley to experience *right-now* change!

This book provides practical understanding that will annihilate once and for all the strongholds that attempt to permeate your life! It is God’s will for you to be reconciled with Him and enjoy His presence. If you have met with obstacles when trying to avoid the words of those who contradict the promises of God for your life, make this book a part of your permanent library. Now is the time to break the insanity cycles that operate in your life by doing something different and expecting different results!

—Creflo Dollar

Founder and Senior Pastor, World Changers Church International

Contents

Introduction	11
1—You Are an Overcomer!	15
2—Removing the Fear Factors	29
3—Defusing the Ticking Time Bomb	45
4—The Power of Imagination	59
5—Driving Out the “Ites”	71
6—The Secret to True Success	81
7—Thoughts, Words, and Actions	99
8—It’s All in the Math	113
Conclusion	119
Declaration of Faith for Success	121
Developing a Relationship with God	123
The Gift of the Holy Spirit	127
Endnotes	133
About the Author	137



Introduction

God wants you to succeed in life. It's been established in His economy from the very beginning. This truth means that wherever you are right now, you can change your direction, you can change your circumstances, and you can change your life.

I realize that there are many hardships that happen to people and hinder some from changing their lives. You may take a look at your own life and think, *There's no way! I could never get past this problem or put this hardship behind me!* While it may be a fact that you aren't capable of overcoming, the truth is that you were created to be an overcomer—with the infinite ability and all-sufficiency of the God who created you because He lives inside you.

God loves you enough to walk right in through the front door of your life (through this book, at the moment), and say, "Look, I know what hurts you. I know what's ailing you. I am familiar with the issues in your life, and I know how to deliver you from them. In fact, I have delivered you from them. What I want to do now is convince you that your deliverance is complete. I will do this by bringing the truth to you. And the truth that you know, that you become intimate with, will make you free." (See John 8:32.)

I believe that God has revealed to me certain insights about this truth, as well as how to overcome life's obstacles, and I feel privileged to share these insights with you.

You know what it took to get to where you are. But do you know what it's going to take to get where you really want to go? Do you know what it will take to do what you really want to do? And do you know what God wants you to do?

We will explore these questions in this book, along with related issues—concepts such as self-image, thought life, whom and what you are listening to, the importance of seeing yourself from God's perspective, and dealing with fear.

A grave and dangerous threat to overcomers is the spirit of fear. *Most of what you must overcome has been brought on by fear.* I realize that this statement may seem shocking to you, but the truth is that if you're not careful or wary of fear, it may influence, control, and ultimately incapacitate you.

Debilitating fear is something that we can all live without. The apostle Paul declared, "*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control*" (2 Timothy 1:7 AMP).

Fear can be described as an overwhelming emotion caused by real or imagined danger. Contrary to what many people believe, most fears are learned. This is a specific aspect of fear that we will discuss in greater detail. Some people would argue that they were born timid or shy, but fear is not a personality type. Timidity and cowardice are not character traits inherent at birth. They are temperaments that are developed in an individual as he or she grows up.

We can see in the above passage that any type of paranoid fear or timidity did not come from God.

CHANGING DIRECTION

There was a short period of time on the earth when fear did not dominate anyone. That was in the garden of Eden, before Adam or Eve

ate of the forbidden fruit. Before the fall, they freely walked and talked with God in the cool of the day.¹ Then, fear appeared on earth for the first time after Adam fell through disobedience.

From that moment on, fear invaded the lives of all mankind. The first mention of fear in the Bible is found in Adam's excuse for hiding from God after he and Eve had sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit, realized that they were naked, and made coverings for themselves. When God summoned them, Adam answered, "*I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself*" (Genesis 3:10). From generation to generation, many people—young and old, rich and poor—have been dominated by fear. As a result, for these individuals, scores of dreams and desires were never fulfilled, success was never within reach, and the overcoming life was inaccessible, blocked by their own fears.

In this book, I want to show you how to loose yourself from whatever has been holding you back and to go on to fulfill your God-given destiny of living successfully.

For instance, you will learn that to overcome any fear, you first must change the way you think. In addition, you must be willing to go against the flow—which can feel as if you're swimming upstream against the current—to accomplish your dreams. Facing a fear may appear to others as going against conventional wisdom, and they will likely question you.

This includes the people who will tell you every reason why you cannot succeed. While they may genuinely care for your well-being, their words of "wisdom" will keep you bound in the fears that have constantly held you back.

You must determine in your heart not to listen to the naysayers who cross your path. Keep in mind that you will probably encounter more people who believe you will fail than people who will encourage you to cast off fear and tenaciously pursue everything God has for you.

I wrote this book to encourage you and to let you know that God wants you to live a full, meaningful, purposeful life—and that you have what it takes to do it.



To overcome any fear, you first must change the way you think.

The Scripture verses you read in these pages will be a great source from which you will draw the strength and courage needed to persevere in facing down whatever you want to overcome. Perseverance is among the greatest assets needed to defeat fear and be an overcomer in life. Here are other assets that will be covered in this book:

- Knowledge of the Scripture by reading, studying, and meditating upon it daily.
- Consistency in prayer: praying regularly in the Spirit² and in your native tongue.
- Faith: confessing, or affirming with the same words, what the Word of God says about you as God's own.
- Obedience to the Lord.

A crucial step to living victoriously as an overcomer is developing a working knowledge of the principles of the kingdom of God in order to assure that you fulfill His purposes for your life. Thus, we will constantly heed scriptural truths and biblical concepts throughout this book.



One thing is certain: if you continue doing what you have always done, you will remain exactly where you are right now.

One thing is certain: if you continue doing what you have always done, you will remain exactly where you are right now. My desire is to motivate, encourage, and enable you to challenge the fears and insecurities that are holding you back. With dogged determination, unwavering fortitude, and ironclad tenacity, you can reach a place where you are able to succeed, increase, and multiply.

It may seem difficult now, but I believe that once empowered by this message, you will realize that when God is with you, fear cannot stop you. You can overcome your fears, change your direction, and walk down the pathway of fear-free living to reach a destination of true success.

Chapter 1



You Are an Overcomer!

We can learn a valuable lesson about the tenacity to overcome by looking at the common salmon. These fish are born in fresh water, yet they later migrate to the ocean, where they live until they are ready to reproduce. After they have matured and are ready to spawn, they return to fresh water. Folklore has it that salmon go back to their birthplaces to lay their eggs.

Their journey is long and arduous. Once the Pacific salmon reach freshwater rivers and streams, they typically travel approximately nine hundred miles, swimming against rushing rapids, fighting strong currents, and climbing elevations of 7,000 feet to reach their final destinations. Not all of the salmon make it. Those that complete the journey must overcome many obstacles to spawn and bring forth a new generation of salmon.

How does the journey of the salmon relate to us? God said that tribulations, or great obstacles, would come against us because we live in a fallen world, *but also that we could overcome them*. (See John 16:33.) The fact is that God sees all of His children as world overcomers, but a lot of born-again, Spirit-filled Christians view themselves differently than God sees them. They see themselves in ways that are drastically—and tragically—different from the way God sees them. They perceive in themselves many faults, insecurities, and shortcomings. They consider

themselves failures, incapable of accomplishing anything worthwhile. They feel defeated by bad habits, hardships, and financial troubles. Yet in the mind of God, their victory has already been established.

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

(1 John 5:4)



No matter what adversity comes against you, God knows you can overcome it.

No matter what adversity comes against you, God knows you can overcome it. He knows because it has already been overcome. He is our ultimate victory over everything, most importantly, death, because He died for our sins and was raised from the dead.

Of course, it is one thing to know that God wants you to be an overcomer, but it is another thing altogether to experience this victory in your everyday life. To be a world overcomer, achieve everything that God has for you, and proclaim victory over whatever comes against you, you will have to surmount the inevitable obstacles that will try to keep you from fulfilling your destiny.

To accomplish this feat of overcoming, you will have to fight against currents that have been carrying you in the same direction for years and years. One of the strongest currents you will have to resist is an enemy that attacks all people, even Christians: fear.

Fear desires to overtake you, influence you to the point of control, and eventually weaken you so much that you're too enfeebled to go on. But you can live as an overcomer and achieve victory after victory. To do that, you first need to understand something.

Fear causes unnatural and discomfoting emotions to develop within us. Unreasonable, tormenting, and persistent fear may destroy your peace and happiness. For some Christians, fear is so prevalent in their lives that they feel it is a part of their personalities, when the truth is that God did not design us to accommodate this type of fear. He certainly cannot give us what He does not possess Himself. Fear is not something you were born with; it is an emotion that is learned and can be developed to an excessive degree.

Again, the first biblical record of human fear appears in Genesis 3:10:

[Adam] *said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was **afraid**, because I was naked; and I hid myself.* (emphasis added)

A close examination of this encounter between God and Adam reveals that fear began with sin. Only after he sinned by defying God's orders and eating the forbidden fruit did Adam exhibit and express fear. (See Genesis 3:1–7.)

If you look closely at your own life and the decisions you have made, you can probably recognize fear as an underlying motive for many of these decisions. Perhaps fear and paranoia have become strongholds in your life. You may wonder how this could have happened.

According to the Bible, "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17 NKJV). Even though God's Word is the highest authority on earth, we often give more credence to the words of people than to God's Word.

In spite of the fact that God declares you to be an overcomer (1 John 5:4), your family, friends, and coworkers may not see you that way. This might account, in part, for your failure to see yourself this way.

WHOM ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

When looking at the formidable trek of the salmon, keep in mind that once the fish leaves the ocean and begins swimming upstream in freshwater rivers and streams, it encounters a lot of refuse and debris coming downstream against it.

In addition to evading all of the muck that gets in its way, the salmon has to be on the lookout for predators. Bears and large birds of prey eagerly feast on the salmon as it endeavors to reach its destination.

In the same way, when you set your course to overcome fear and follow your dream, you



When you set your course to overcome fear and follow your dream, you will have to navigate through fast-flowing, debris-filled currents.

will have to navigate through fast-flowing, debris-filled waters. In addition to dodging the garbage of self-doubt, insecurity, and timidity that is thrown your way, you must also be aware of predators that lie in wait.

Every day, you interact with a variety of people—family members, coworkers, friends, casual acquaintances, and complete strangers. Whether they are guiding you, counseling you, directing you, or offering you suggestions, you hear the words that are spoken—not only with your ears, but also with your heart and soul. Their words—whether good or bad, positive or negative, uplifting or degrading—can shape how you view yourself. They can have a significant impact on what you believe you can achieve and the goals you set out to accomplish.

If people constantly say the same things to you, over and over again, you will very likely begin to believe what they are saying. Wrong beliefs are often developed by constantly listening to—or hearing, heeding, and assimilating—words of rejection, condemnation, and degradation. Likewise, the right types of beliefs are developed by hearing—but hearing the Word of God, which is how faith comes. *“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

Negative words are to the psyche what radium and other radioactive materials are to the body. Some naturally occurring substances are classified as *radioactive*, meaning they emit radiation or have radioactive properties associated with them. The effects of exposure to radioactive materials are usually not immediate, but, over time, and depending on the amount of radiation to which people are exposed, the symptoms caused by prolonged exposure begin to manifest themselves.

Marie Curie, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist who isolated radioactive isotopes, discovered the elements radium and polonium and ultimately developed the theory she called “radioactivity.” But while she was performing years of groundbreaking research, radiation exposure was taking its toll. She died of aplastic anemia, or leukemia, as a result, but this problem did not manifest for many years.

Something similar happens to people emotionally after prolonged exposure to negative words. But prolonged exposure to positive words—the truths and principles that fill the Bible—produces an effect, with opposite results: not death, but abundant life. We must expose ourselves continually to God’s Word, which builds us up and strengthens our

convictions about who we are in Christ. God's Word has properties that encourage and uphold us when we expose ourselves through hearing or reading the Word, as well as when we hear others preach and teach about it. We also benefit from studying the Scriptures and meditating (thinking, pondering) on them.

I encourage you to read the Word regularly. Search the Scriptures diligently, as they address and provide answers for the totality of mankind's needs. Believers should do this because the Bible is God's Word of instruction to those He has redeemed. According to the psalmist, it is "*a lamp unto [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path*" (Psalm 119:105).

Because the Word tells us who we are in Christ and instructs us how to live as faithful servants of God, we should give it a place of priority in our lives. So, whom are you listening to? Do the words of others have more authority in your life than the Word of God has?

If you are paying more attention to the negative, fear-inducing words people say to you instead of what Scripture says, you will eventually allow fear to dominate everything you do, including the things you say, the career opportunities you pursue, and any other goals you might try to accomplish.

Again, debilitating fear is not from God, and He does not want you to be dominated by it. This truth is quite clear in 2 Timothy 1:7, where Paul wrote that God did not give us a spirit of fear. Instead, He endued us with His power, His love, and sound minds, or the mind of Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 2:16.) God not only sees you as an overcomer, but He also sees you as fearless.

When God gives you an idea for a new business venture or when He wants you to minister words of comfort and healing to someone, He sees you only on the basis of His Word. He doesn't see you filled with fear, but rather filled with His abilities and wisdom. Now that you know this, you can no longer use the excuse, "But I'm timid and shy."

When you become a born-again Christian and are baptized in the Holy Spirit, you are filled with God's power and love. (If you have not yet been born again and filled with the Spirit, refer to the prayers and information in the back of this book to learn what is meant by *baptism in the Holy Spirit*.) God expects you to use the power He provides to overcome any fear that threatens to hold you back.

God knows the abilities that He has imparted to you. He knows that the same power that raised His Son Jesus¹ from the dead now dwells in you. (See Romans 8:11.) He expects you to use the strengths, talents, and perseverance with which He has equipped you.

CREATED TO RULE AND REIGN

At the beginning of time, when God created Adam and placed him in the garden of Eden, He told him, “*Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth*” (Genesis 1:26).



God wants you to rule and reign on the earth, just as Adam did.

This command didn't begin and end with Adam. It was passed on to all of humanity, and it has not changed. God wants you to rule and reign on the earth, just as Adam did. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we humans are to be at the bottom of the totem pole, holding up everything else.

No, God wants us to operate with dominion on this planet. God sees you as a ruler, one of His representatives endowed with stewardship rights over His creation. And this is how you must see yourself: as a ruler, and as one who overcomes any and every challenge that rises up against you.

Genesis 1:28 says, “*And God blessed them.*” Another way to convey the meaning of the word “*blessed*” in this verse is with the phrase “*empowered to prosper.*”² Think about that—God empowered man to succeed. He empowered us to be fruitful, to multiply, to subdue, and to have dominion. He did this at the beginning of time.

From God's perspective, the blessing that is upon you for success was instituted a long time ago and reinstated through Christ. It is not something that you have to wait for God to do; it is already done.

Some people are waiting for God to bless them, not realizing that He already has. He is the one who's waiting—waiting for them to realize and

walk in what is already theirs. God is out in front of us, saying, “Come on, walk with Me.”

GOD IS MY FRIEND

In the same way that God walked with Adam in the garden of Eden, He wants to walk with you. Before the fall, God did not walk ahead of Adam; the two walked side by side. They walked as friends, and that is how He wants to walk with you—as your friend.

As a youngster, I had a group of friends with whom I always hung around. We were buddies. When we walked home from school, we never walked single file. We were all on the same level, so we walked shoulder to shoulder; we talked face-to-face.

That is how God wants us to operate with Him. He is not some remote Supreme Being who is so far away that He is unreachable, un-touchable, and unable to relate to us. On the contrary, He couldn't be closer—He dwells within us. (See John 14:20.) We were created so that He could dwell in us. Wherever we go, God goes with us. Whatever we face, we face with God. We never face anything alone.

We can be confident that whatever we face, we do not stand in our own strength but in the strength of God, because “*greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*” (1 John 4:4). God consistently encourages His people to be strong and of good courage for the simple reason that He is with us.

SEEING YOURSELF AS GOD SEES YOU

To be the person God destined you to be, you must daily build His image of you inside yourself. I want to show you how to do that. It is imperative that you begin seeing yourself the way God sees you. Because you will *always* behave in a manner that is consistent with the way you see yourself, you will never rise above the level of your self-image. So if you see yourself as triumphant, you will experience victory.

On the other hand, if you see yourself as defeated, then, no matter how hard you try, something will *always* go wrong, sealing your defeat. If you believe that everything bad that could possibly happen will, in fact, come to pass, then nothing will ever go right for you. However, if you see yourself the same way God sees you, you will always feel ready to rise above any adversity that comes against you and to face down any fear that tries to bind you in passivity.

In the Bible, whenever God dispatched an angel to deliver a message to someone, such as Mary, Jesus' mother, or the shepherds, usually the first thing the angel said was "Fear not." This is important. The close proximity of a heavenly being—the very presence of God—was reason enough for these recipients not to give fear a place in their lives.

Can you imagine what your life would be like if you were not afraid of anything? Suppose you believed that you could never fail at anything.

How would you behave? How would you live?
How would you conduct yourself?



God sees you as a conqueror. He sees you as an overcomer, no matter what comes against you.

God sees you as a conqueror. He sees you as an overcomer, no matter what comes against you. In His mind, fear can never be justified. As far as He is concerned, there is no reason for you to be afraid about anything because He has given you everything you need that pertains to life and godliness. (See 2 Peter 1:3.) He has given you everything you need to be an overcomer.

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

God said, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*" (Genesis 1:26). Adam and Eve—humans—were the last beings God created, but He used no other creature as a model from which to form man. The design of mankind is entirely unique, different from every other type of living thing that God created.

Humans are unique because they are fashioned after God's image and likeness. This shows us that God unequivocally wants us to be as

He is. First John 4:17 says, “*As he [God] is, so are we in this world.*” This is the perspective from which God sees us.

If God formed and fashioned us in His image and likeness, it follows that He wants us to be like Him. I would like to submit to you that God has a positive self-image. His self-esteem and self-respect are without question. Since we are created in His image, we, too, should have healthy, positive self-images.

In God’s infinite wisdom, though we all resemble Him, each of us is a unique expression of Him and His nature. In other words, He will never run out of ways to express Himself in mankind, but, in spite of our diversity of skin tone, personalities, strengths, and other attributes, a common thread of divine character links us all together. We each have different talents and abilities, but our characters should be aligned with God and His Word.

THINKING THE WAY GOD THINKS

To live as an overcomer of this world, you must see yourself the way God sees you. If your self-image is a far cry from the image God paints in the Bible of His children, then you must change your perspective of yourself so that it matches what Scripture says about you. This shift in perspective is achieved by changing the way you think.

You must force yourself to think on “*whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report*” (Philippians 4:8). Thinking on what is true and good leaves no room in your mind for a stronghold of fear and negativity.

The Word declares that you are a conqueror, or an overcomer through Christ. (See Romans 8:37.) It also says that as you reflect God’s character, whatever you do will prosper. (See Psalm 1:3.) “*God is not a man, that he should lie*” (Numbers 23:19), so if He said that you will succeed, then you will. Regardless of what a situation may look like, God’s Word will triumph if you do not give up.

Remember that if you have been born again, you are a child of God, and He paid an inconceivable price—the blood of His only begotten

Son—for you to have fellowship with Him. Believe in His boundless love for you. In the same way that a loving parent would do anything to ensure his child’s success, God made provision through His Word for your success in every area of your life.

Deuteronomy 28:1–2 says, *“And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, . . . all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee.”* To *“hearken diligently”* means “to hear with attention or interest, listen to . . . give heed . . . discern . . . perceive,”³ or to listen “listeningly.” In other words, you must give the Word of God your undivided attention and focus. Don’t allow one word to fall by the wayside.

When you give your full attention to the Word and listen carefully to what God says about you, the Word of God will prevail, stamping out the fear that is trying to overtake you.

Only you can decide how you think. Your pastor cannot think for you, your parents cannot think for you, I cannot think for you—and neither can anyone else. If your self-image is so poor that you “think” you will never amount to anything, then this attitude will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you dwell on defeat, then that is how you will end up in life—defeated and forgotten, never having made the slightest impact on the lives of the people around you.

If, on the other hand, you choose to believe what the Word says about you and refuse to believe the unkind words other people have said to put you down, you can rise above their falsehoods, which contradict God’s Word. Then, you can step out with fearlessness and go after your heart’s God-given dreams and desires with unflinching determination.

SOWING THE SEED OF THE WORD

In the parable of the sower (see Luke 8; Mark 4; Matthew 13), Jesus compared the Word of God to seeds that have the potential to take root and bear fruit in believers’ lives, depending upon how the believers receive them.

As the farmer was scattering his seed, some of it fell by the wayside—or along the path—and it was trampled upon. Other seed was

devoured by birds. Some seed fell among the rocks, where it sprung up but quickly withered because it lacked moisture. And finally, some seed fell among the thorns; but as it grew, the thorns choked it out.

In school, students learn various principles of science, such as Newton's laws of motion, Einstein's theory of relativity, and other axioms that explain how and why things work. Laws of nature are described as an order, or relation, of phenomena that have no variation, regardless of changing conditions.

A spiritual law is one that is unalterable by any means, whether natural or artificial. It is a fact that has been established by God and supersedes any subclass of laws, natural or man-made.

One spiritual law is Galatians 6:7, which says, *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”* It is a commonly known fact that if a seed is sown into the ground and cultivated properly with adequate sunshine and water, a harvest is forthcoming—it will germinate, sprout, and grow. Certain factors may interrupt the process, such as birds or insects consuming the seeds before they can germinate. Still other factors may affect the process—a drought may stifle growth and decrease yield, an invasion of weeds may choke out the seedlings. Yet these factors do not change the law that governs the growth process. What has been planted, if it is allowed to grow, will develop into a predetermined outcome. A sunflower seed will yield a sunflower; an apple seed will sprout into the beginnings of a fruit tree. The sowing of our words, thoughts, and deeds will inevitably yield a harvest in kind.

I am reminded of when my daughters planted marigold seeds in a flowerpot on the back porch of our home. They watered the seeds, fertilized the soil, and made sure they were placed in direct sunlight. In a few weeks, the seeds had sprouted, and the girls were excited. A few weeks later, they noticed another kind of plant in the flowerpot. My wife, Marjanita, explained that what they saw were dandelion weeds. Wind blows the seeds around, and because weed seeds are tough and hardy, they take root wherever they find soil. The girls were sad because they expected beautiful orange marigolds to grow up, not yellow dandelion weeds. Marjanita reminded the girls about the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3–9.

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they have no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. (Matthew 13:3–8)

Jesus explained in Luke 8:11 that the seed is actually the Word of God. However, in the first three places where the Word was sown, we see that the seed did not take root and was therefore unfruitful. From this, we are able to recognize that the factors that precluded the seeds' growth have parallels in the spiritual realm that affect the fruitfulness of God's Word in our own lives. We, too, often erect obstacles that would cause a crop failure of the Word in our lives, such as a lack of diligence in Bible study, neglecting to spend time in prayer to God, and quickly losing enthusiasm for our faith.

This parable sets forth three potential seed yields: thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and one-hundredfold. (See Matthew 13:8.) I believe this parable addresses a critical issue in human endeavor—the issue of completing the things that we set out to do, the things God wants us to do.



If we allow the first three soil conditions to prevail in our lives, we will accomplish nothing worthwhile, much less God-ordained.

The four soil conditions—hardened, stony, filled with thorns, and nutrient-rich—illustrate four possible conditions of the human heart, or spirit. All soil conditions but the last produced no yield or harvest whatsoever. It is my observation and belief that if we allow the first three soil conditions to prevail in our lives, we will accomplish nothing worthwhile, much less God-ordained.

The fourth condition, the good soil, provides an environment in which productivity can occur. Jesus said that the decision rests with us as to the degree to which we will

produce a harvest. Our aptitudes for success depend on the qualities of our “soils,” or the extent to which we are nourished by the Word of God and open and obedient to the leading of His Spirit.

God does not put a limit on faith, and neither does faith put a limit on God. Jesus said in Luke 8:15 that those with an *“honest and good heart”* hear and keep the Word, and that’s when it becomes fruitful.

A choice has been set before you. Are you going to believe what God says about you, or are you going allow the opinions of other people to determine what you think of yourself?

Realize that if you continue believing the words of others that have shackled your life, you will remain as you always have been. With God, on the other hand, you will find that nothing is impossible for you to accomplish. That’s certainly good news to me. What do you think?