



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

**Victory over
Evil**

**Victory over
Fear**

**Victory over
Ourselves**

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2016

January

Starting in 2016, there will be no distinction between the facilitator and participant guides - there will only be one monthly guide for the Midweek Experience Curriculum small group sessions. The guides will continue to provide discussion questions, Bible references, thoughts for further discussion, and notes for the facilitator if they are necessary. The scripts for each session of the month will be in a separate document.

Session 1: Victory over Evil

Welcome to the first small group session of 2016! It's nice to be with you all and I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year and many blessings for the time ahead.

As we have heard, our theme for the year is Victory with Christ, and we wish this for you in the coming year. We will be focusing this month on three victories that we can have in our lives with Christ: victory over evil, victory over fear, and victory over ourselves. In this session we are going to explore what evil is, how it could affect us physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and ways for us to overcome through Jesus, with Him as our example.

There are specific things we associate with evil in our world today. It seems that every day we are confronted with media images of terrorist attacks, school shootings, and other horrific acts. When we hear these reports, we can't help but think that evil is winning. Evil isn't only exposed in devastating, terrible situations, but also in the little, mundane occurrences of our lives. For example, gossip in our daily lives, including our interactions in the congregation, can tear down our relationships and our unity. In all of these cases, evil works to destroy something that is precious. It has the ability to break us physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and could separate us from God. In these moments, we have a choice; we can be overcome by evil or we can choose to fight it.

Today we can look back at Jesus' death and know that it was necessary in order to provide each person with the promise of salvation. At the time, Jesus' experience leading up to His death shows moments where evil seemed to be victorious. Not only was Jesus physically tortured and killed, but He also faced enemies that sought to hurt him emotionally and spiritually. In Matthew 27:27-31, the soldiers who lead Jesus to the cross mock Him by putting a scarlet robe and crown of thorns on Him, bowing to Him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" In this moment, the soldiers are looking to humiliate Jesus, making Him look like an imposter in front of the people who, a week before, had hope that He would change things for them. Later in the chapter, this is followed by the attempt of Jesus' spiritual destruction when the chief priests say, "If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him." Jesus could have exercised His power as the Son of God by actually doing what the chief priests ridiculed Him with. However, it would have not been a decision that was a part of God's will, but rather something that would just appease the people. Jesus lived His life according to His Father's will and He did not allow any evil to deter Him from completing His part in the plan of salvation. This serves as a great example for us in battling the evil we face in our world today and following God's purposes for us.

As we read about Jesus' crucifixion in the Gospels, we see that Jesus did not allow evil to hinder His selfless love for all. Even as He is hanging on the cross, the ultimate victim, Jesus asks for forgiveness for the people who are crucifying Him. He also serves through His conversation with the two men crucified with Him and even says to the thief on His right that "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:34, 43). Jesus also cares for His mother in a very direct and personal way when He says, "Woman, behold your son!" And entrusts her care to John, saying "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26-27) In this way, Jesus demonstrates that in moments of evil and great pain, we still want to reflect God's love to those around us.

By studying Jesus' actions leading up to His death, we can learn how to overcome evil. We can do this by remaining faithful to the Lord, not letting anything deter us from following God's will, and doing good unto others in all circumstances.

Jesus gained victory over evil; even physical destruction could not stop Him from overcoming evil, as shown by His resurrection. We do not have the ability to prevent all evil that physically and emotionally hurts us or others, but we respond by serving each other in kindness, empathy, and love. We can also overcome spiritual evil that seeks to separate us from God. And if we become weak in this battle against evil, every Sunday we can experience Christ's victory. The overcoming power of Jesus Christ that we celebrate during Holy Communion can give us the strength to have victory over evil as He did. Let us be renewed by this and not let evil defeat us as we answer God's calling for our lives to follow His will.

Please turn to your guides to go over the discussion questions.

Session 2: Victory over fear

Welcome back! It's nice to be with you again. As we focus on this year's theme of gaining victories with Christ, let's wage battle against fear and, with the help of Jesus Christ, seek to overcome it and embrace a life that faces all challenges and circumstances with faith instead of fear.

We can read in the Gospels many exhortations from Jesus Christ that urge us to "not fear" or "have courage" or "take heart" or "be of good cheer." The one He is recorded saying the most was "don't be afraid." Jesus never said that those who believe in God would be free from those things that could cause worry, anxiety, and fear. Rather, He provided encouragement that with Him we could step into life's challenges with courage and the knowledge that nothing is more powerful than the presence of God in our lives. As Christian author Max Lucado wrote, "Christ-followers contract malaria, bury children, and battle addiction, and as a result, face fears. It's not the absence of storms that set us apart. It's whom we discover in the storm: an unstirred Christ."

What are the effects of fear? Some may say that fear isn't all bad. We look both ways when crossing a street because we fear what could happen if we don't. So fear creates an awareness and protects us in certain situations. On the other hand, fear can simply be a crippling, paralyzing presence in our life that does little good. Fear can dissolve our confidence in God. It can overwhelm us with doubt. It can numb our memory. Fear can stop us from embracing the purpose and calling God has for our life. It can separate us from our potential. Fear is a powerful force in our world today but those who walk with Jesus Christ and have the power of God's Spirit living within can take heart in Jesus's words, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The Gospels relay stories of Jesus helping people to overcome their fear with a simple remedy: faith in Him. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of Jesus and His disciples crossing a lake when a storm rises up, tosses the boat around, and begins to fill the vessel with water. Jesus is asleep when this happens and the disciples rush to wake Him so that He can share in their worry and concern. After being

awakened Jesus asks them “why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” He then rebukes the winds and the seas. The disciples, along with all of the others sailing at that moment, find themselves on calm water. This is a beautiful experience that shows both the humanness and godliness of Jesus. He was tired from the events of the day and He could rest with the complete trust and confidence He had in God. This experience was a teaching moment for the disciples to show them once again who Jesus was and that they should have complete confidence in Him. How quickly do we get overwhelmed by fear in the midst of the storms of life? Do we know who to turn to during those moments? The disciples feared for their lives because they failed to see the source of life that was with them in the boat. Jesus is with us in every moment. Let’s look to Him as the Son of God, our Savior and Redeemer, and find confidence to defeat our fear.

A second example we can look at is when Jesus walked on the water and met His disciples in the middle of the sea. Here we can read in the Gospels that the disciples were initially afraid when they saw Jesus walking towards them during the dark of night. They thought He was a ghost and they cried out in fear. Jesus reached out to them with the words, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” Then Peter said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” As Peter walks on the water, he becomes fearful of the wind, takes his focus off of Jesus, and begins to sink. Here we can see that the wind caused Peter to doubt and once again we find Jesus as the hero in the story. Are we able to hear Jesus’s voice today calling out to us “It is I; do not be afraid”? Or do we allow our fear to cripple us to a point when we can no longer see Jesus extending His help to us? Peter walking on water was an extraordinary act made possible by Jesus. His fear of sinking could have kept him in the boat, but he trusted in the Lord and was able for a few moments to do the impossible. As God’s children we are called to do extraordinary things and fear can hold us back from experiencing our calling. Let’s allow Jesus to be the hero of our life’s story and embrace what He calls us to do.

Today, many are fearful and worried about the events that go on in our world. This fear can greatly affect us, cause uncertainty and doubt, and can become a paralyzing barrier. Parents worry about what the world will be like in a few years for their children. Young people worry about being able to live out their hopes and aspirations. Seniors perhaps sit in wonderment and concern about the tragedies and disasters happening today. In 2 Timothy (1:7), Paul gives us words of encouragement in our struggle with fear, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” This was actually the Bible verse given to my wife and I on our wedding day, over 30 years ago, and has been a wonderful guide for us. Our “sound mind” comes from knowing that we have a future with our God. This verse has helped us keep that future in mind in the face of daily life. Additionally, in 1 John (4:18) we read that “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” These two verses assure us that if we rest in God’s perfect love then we will discover a remedy for fear.

There are many more examples in the Gospels of Jesus helping people overcome their fears and we encourage you to continue reading through them. Fear can, no doubt, hinder our journey of faith and cause us to: worry, fail to embrace our calling, and stand paralyzed in the midst of our world. Allow faith in Jesus Christ to grow within you to give you the victory over fear so you can fulfill the purpose God has called you to.

Session 3: Victory over Ourselves

Thanks for joining us again! In the previous two sessions we covered victory over evil and victory over fear. Today we will continue our look at the various aspects of victory with Christ, most notably overcoming ourselves, through the story of the presentation of Christ in the temple. Please follow along in your Bible as we work through this portion of Scripture in Luke 2:21-38.

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Mary and Joseph come to the temple to fulfill their commitment to God according to the Jewish law; circumcision of their son, the offering of their first-born to God, and the cleansing of Mary after birth as outlined in Leviticus and Exodus (Lev. 12:2-8, Exodus 13:1-2). Obedience to the law was costly, as noted in the necessary offering of the two birds, plus the cost of the journey to Jerusalem. We no longer follow these ceremonial laws, but there are many commands and instructions that Jesus gave that we want to follow. What do we need to overcome in our lives to make these necessary sacrifices and offerings to God? With what faithfulness do we commit to prayer, fasting, offering, spreading the Gospel, and worship?

In verses 25-28 we read: And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God...

We read that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon: the Spirit told him he would see Christ, and then led him to the temple to fulfill that promise. In order for us to follow the prompting of the Spirit, we often have to overcome our pride in our own plans to do God's will. Proverbs 16:9 tells us that *a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps*. What plans have you made without asking the Lord for His direction?

Continuing in verses 29-32: and [he] said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."

Simeon, a faithful servant of God, does not fear death and even welcomes it now that he has seen the salvation of God in the Christ Child. He finds joy in God's purpose and plan for his life, even when his time is ending. He blesses God in thankfulness and confesses his faith in Christ as the Savior of all people. Not only has he overcome the human inclination to fear death, he also overcomes prejudice against people not like himself, in his proclamation of *a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles*. (Bible references Luke 2:32, Isaiah 9:2, 49:6, Acts 1:8) What prejudice do we have to overcome to truly see

God's love and salvation for ALL people? Is there an unforgiving nature in us that we need to overcome to reflect God's love towards our neighbor?

In verses 33-35: *And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

This second part of Simeon's benediction seems more like a warning than a blessing, but his prophecy is fulfilled. Christ was a blessing to Israel, but also caused many to be prejudiced and enraged against Him, *a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall...a trap and snare.* (Isaiah 8:14-15, 2 Peter 2:7-8) What is your response to Christ? Have His teachings caused you to rise or fall? Have His teachings brought us closer to Him or pushed us away?

It is not possible in our human weakness that we could fully follow all the teachings of Christ. However, we can remember that God revealed Himself in the weakness of a child, and later in the powerlessness of a man who was arrested, tormented, and crucified. Paul tells us that the Lord's *strength is made perfect in weakness.* (2 Corinthians 12:9) And in Hebrews we read that *we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.* (Hebrews 4:15) God sees our weaknesses and still wants to work with us and through us. But this means that we must decide to be dependent on God, to trust and rely on Him. We surrender our own will to align it with His will. How do we show our dependence on God? Anna shows us the way...

In verses 36-38 we can read: *Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

Anna is the embodiment of Psalm 130: *I wait for the Lord...and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning...O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption.* Anna's faith wasn't just a series of check-boxes, but became an inseparable part of her being. Matthew 5:8 tells us that the pure in heart shall see God. Simeon and Anna's obedience to God's purposes and commands in their lives allowed them to "see God." What are you obedient to or dependent on? What have you become in the past year?

Our human weaknesses give cause for much struggle in the fight to overcome ourselves. But God's strength is made perfect in weakness. As Paul said: *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* (2 Corinthians 12:10) Let us continue to learn of Christ as we strive to overcome ourselves.