

Are You on the Verge of Wrecking Your Life?

In Russell Moore's compelling book, *Tempted and Tried*, a chapter entitled "Why You're on the Verge of Wrecking Your Life (Especially If You Don't Know It)" caught my attention. Moore writes, quoting a scientist who studied cattle behavior, "A slaughterhouse, in order to keep the cattle relaxed, should remove anything from the sight of the animals that isn't completely familiar. The real problem is novelty ... Workers shouldn't yell at the cows, she said, and they should never ever use cattle prods, because they are counterproductive and unneeded. If you just keep the cows contented and comfortable, they'll go wherever they're led. Don't surprise them, don't unnerve them, and above all, don't hurt them."

Apparently, scientists devised new technology that revolutionized death in the large slaughter-houses. Moore continues, "The cows aren't prodded off the truck but are led, in silence, onto a ramp. They go through a 'squeeze chute,' a gentle pressure device that mimics a mother's nuzzling touch. The cattle continue down the ramp onto a smoothly curving path. There are no sudden turns. The cows experience the sensation of going home, the same kind of way they've traveled so many times before. As they mosey along the path, they don't even notice when their hooves are no longer touching the ground. A conveyor belt slowly lifts them gently upward, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, a blunt instrument levels a surgical strike right between their eyes. They're transitioned from livestock to meat, and they're never aware enough to be alarmed by any of it."

This is difficult to read but necessary. It is a vivid visual for spiritual warfare. Succumbing to temptation is often gradual, easy, and effortless until the enemy levels a surgical strike right to the heart. We're often too smart to

take deliberate plunges, but we're easily enticed to take one step at a time, one compromise at a time, one bad choice at a time until we're at the bottom keenly aware of our gradual, but deep descent.

You didn't choose this, but you are in a war—no peace treaties can be signed, no concessions can be made and no compromises can be negotiated. You can't say, "I don't want to get involved" ... you're already a target. You can't remain passive, aloof or carefree against an enemy who doesn't sleep or slumber. He is sent to kill, steal and destroy. Wake up! Life is a battleground, not a playground.

The classic line from an old Wyatt Earp movie states it well, "You tell them I'm coming! And I'm bringing hell with me!" The same applies to us: When we make a decision to follow God's principles, all hell breaks loose and is dead-set against us. Because it is a spiritual battle, our only recourse is to engage the enemy with spiritual weapons (see Eph. 6).

When we obey God, He strengthens us. When we humble ourselves, His grace is manifested more abundantly, "Just as water ever seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds you abased and empty, His glory and power flow in" (Andrew Murray). Disobedience leads to desperation and despair.

Throughout the years, a few disgruntled readers, including pastors, have commented that I should "Ease up—people don't want direct confrontation." They suggest that I come through the back door with my approach—be funny, winsome, and light-hearted. But something is clearly wrong when we continue to read headlines such as "Broken Homes in the United States Are at Alarming Level, Study Finds", or that 88 percent of scenes in porn films include sexual aggression," or "What's Really Behind America's Suicide Epidemic? Why did 40,000 Americans kill themselves last year, the most in recorded history?" These statistics and headlines indicate that we are far beyond a backdoor approach, we need to hit the enemy head on.

Too many are choosing therapy over obedience, counseling over conduct and talking over doing. An African pastor was asked, "Why is there so much counseling in the American church but not in the African church?" He responded, "In America you counsel; in Africa we repent." Well said.

1 Corinthians 10:13 offers strategic insight, "No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure [We can say no] but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." The door swings both ways; you can enter or exit.

To "bear it" means that we are not trapped; we are not without hope. God will help us carry the load. When we see something we need, desire or want, our first impulse is to act on it. The pressure feels unbearable and we cave in. This defining moment is often the most difficult when overcoming temptation. "Do you not know that to whom you yield yourselves as slaves to obey, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). When we indulge in sin, we are presenting ourselves as slaves to the desire. It's important to resist at the lowest level and at the first opportunity. Here are some helpful free downloads of books I've written.

I'm not discounting the deep emotional and psychological pain of bondage to sin or emotional trauma, but I do want to remind you that God makes provision for all of our needs through a relationship with Him and obedience to His Word. Counseling with those skilled in the Word is invaluable, and desperately needed, but all the counseling in the world will not work if the heart is not right. God heals us primarily with obedience to His Word and repentance through a broken heart: "He sent His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction" (Ps. 107:20). We must stop fighting this fact; we will not win without obedience and complete trust in Christ.