

Who—or What—Is Controlling Your Choices More Than You Think?

“Grace changes the nature of man, but nothing changes the nature of sin” (John Owen).

The principle of sowing and reaping applies to all areas of our lives. We must first discipline ourselves before desire comes. We must first empty ourselves in order to be filled. We must first obey before receiving the blessing. We must first break before there is restoration. We must first pray before there is transformation. We must praise Him before there is peace. And we must first seek Him if we are to truly find Him – we must sow before we reap.

The word of God plants seeds (sows) so we can reap later. For example, when discouraged, refer to 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 and thank God for His shelter in the storm, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

When a difficult financial decision needs to be made, look to Proverbs 22:1, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.” When confronted with adultery or sexual purity, recall Proverbs 9:17-18, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of the grave.”

We need to stop watching all of the drama in the news and begin applying Paul’s words and fear and anxiety will flee:

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let everyone come to know your gentleness. The Lord is at hand.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think on these things. Do those things which you have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you (Phil. 4:4-9).

Why would we willingly walk into the enemy's camp? Why would we feed wrong desires and thoughts? Feeding the flesh does nothing but bring war against the spirit. The sinful nature opposes the Spirit, primarily through our desires. These opposing forces are constantly fighting each other, and our choices are never free from this conflict (see Gal. 5:17).

The Bible reveals that the devil is the prince of this world (Eph. 2:2); therefore, you should pay close attention to what you watch and listen to—the force controlling it ultimately controls you. Romans 8:6 (NLT) states, “So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.” With God's help, you'll begin to control your thoughts instead of allowing your thoughts to control you.

Here are some practical steps:

1. Schedule God's word when you're fresh and not distracted—begin with worship. Whatever hurts our praying must be removed. “The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day. If God is not first in our thoughts and

efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the remainder of the day.” (E.M. Bounds)

2. Follow with prayer; don't be in a hurry. Men would live better if they prayed better. “In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.” (John Bunyan) Check out the motivational message about prayer: y

3. Have a systematic reading plan, 30 minutes a day minimum, to draw near to God. Note questions and seek to answer them later in the day.

4. End with prayer and ask for help to apply what you learned.

5. Read a devotional such as *My Utmost for His Highest*.

6. Begin the day with the Word and end it with the Word.

Here's how it plays out: During worship, the heart begins to soften and open. You hear the still, small voice of God during prayer as He draws your heart toward Him. Reading reinforces, educates and opens our eyes to His will. Answering questions that we have builds faith (apologetics). The devotional reading sparks a deeper walk, a deeper hunger for God. The ending reading sets the stage for the following day.

Sin is deceptive. We are free of sin's bondage but not its influence. “Grace changes the nature of man, but nothing changes the nature of sin” (John Owen). Many of us talk as if God is real but act as if He's not. We are witnessing a generation of people hearing the Word of God but not applying it. Ironically, the power is in the application, not the knowledge. James 1:22 warns, “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 4:17 adds, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, it is sin.” Sin blinds, leads, deceives, justifies, excuses and prevents us from fulfilling God's will. This is why the application of God's Word is vital—God uses the Word to bring clarity.

If you've fallen away from God, use this opportunity to turn back to Him and His Word: "Your Word is a lamp and a light" (see Ps. 119:105). He will not let you down: "For the eyes of the Lord move about on all the earth to strengthen the heart that is completely toward Him" (2 Chron. 16:9a).