

Crushing the Stubborn Stronghold That Mercilessly Robs You of Joy

Most people would say they have goals and want to make progress in life. It's a natural desire, and there's nothing wrong with wanting promotion in various areas. But we need to realize that anytime we ask God to promote us, or use us in greater ways, we're going to have to go through a time of testing and preparation to get there.

It's important to understand that God will never tempt us with anything evil, but He will allow—and even sometimes arrange—for things to happen in our lives that will challenge us and help us develop the character we need to successfully handle greater privileges and responsibilities.

James 1:2-3 (AMPC) says, "Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience." When we go through trials with a good attitude, trusting God to use them for our good, then they will work things out of us—immature behaviors and ungodly mindsets—and cause us to grow in our faith.

There are different kinds of tests that get us to the point where we learn how to do things God's way. One of the most common is the forgiveness test.

Forgiving people who hurt you, disappoint you, do something you don't like or maybe even betray you is not easy. It's one of the most challenging things we have to learn to do as Christians because it can seem so unfair to just let someone get away with the injustice they've done.

I understand this very well because I felt that way when the Lord spoke to my heart about forgiving my father for the years of abuse that he put me through. But I came to realize that holding onto my anger was really just continuing to hurt me. I needed to be more concerned about myself and my relationship with God, rather than trying to make him sorry for what he had done. The truth is when you choose to forgive people, you're doing yourself a favor.

In Matthew 5:8 (NIV), Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." And Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

It's so important for us to keep our heart right with God. When we do, we can hear Him more clearly, be a lot more sensitive to His presence and enjoy close fellowship with Him. And there is nothing we need more than the presence of God in our lives. God is the source of every good thing, and Psalm 16:11b (NKJV) says, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." I love Psalm 17:15 (AMPC), which says, "... I shall be fully satisfied, when I awake [to find myself] beholding Your form [and having sweet communion with You].:

If we are not pure in heart, we're sacrificing an intimate relationship with God because we'd rather harbor anger, bitterness and resentment toward others in our heart.

Everyone experiences offenses at times, and when we do, we have to be determined to do something about it with God's help. The Bible says in Proverbs 4:23 that you need to guard your heart, not that He'll send an angel to miraculously do it for you. So when you recognize that you're offended by something, you need to quickly take action, doing what God tells you to do to overcome it.

Mark 11:25 (AMPC) says, "Whenever you stand praying, if you

have anything against anyone, forgive him and let it drop (leave it, let it go), in order that your Father Who is in heaven may also forgive you your [own] failings and shortcomings and let them drop.” This verse is saying that if we choose to hold on to unforgiveness, then God can’t forgive us of our sins, and our intimacy with Him will suffer.

The best thing we can do when we need to forgive someone is pray for them, make the decision to forgive and “let it drop (leave it, let it go).” That means you stop talking about what they did, stop thinking about it and rehearsing it over and over and over in your mind.

The quicker you decide to let offenses go, the easier it will be; however, if there is a hurt that has been in your heart for a long time, it may take some time for you to get totally free of it. But you can do it—by God’s grace—if you won’t give up.

Jesus gave His life so we can have relationship with God, not religion. I want to encourage you to choose a pure heart, free of unforgiveness, so you can have a personal, intimate relationship with God that will fill you with His joy and prepare you to fulfill His good plan for your life. {eoa}