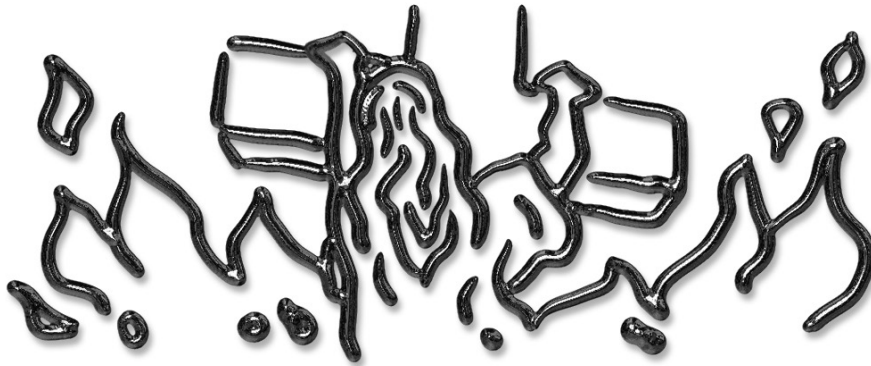


Fighting With All Our Might



SABBATH—JULY 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: John 16:5–15; Colossians 1:28, 29; Deuteronomy 4:4; Luke 13:24; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Hebrews 12:4; 1 Peter 1:13; Jeremiah 17:9; Genesis 3:6; 2 Samuel 11:2–4; Galatians 2:11, 12; Matthew 5:29, 30; Genesis 32.

MEMORY VERSE: “I work hard with all the strength of Christ. His strength works powerfully in me” (Colossians 1:29, NIV).



How can two people who had the same experience act in completely different ways?

TWO PEOPLE WERE INVITED to be guests on a talk show. One of the guests was a man. The other guest was a woman. Each one of them had a child who had been killed. 20 years before, the woman's son was killed. The woman continued to feel angry at her son's killer after all these years. The man had a daughter who was killed only a few years earlier. But the man was not angry at his daughter's killers. The man said that he forgave the killers. The man also said that God changed his hurt into a blessing. Yes, the man's pain was terrible. But the man became an example of how God can bring healing to the worst times in our lives.

How can two people who had the same experience act in different ways? How does spiritual change happen in the life of a Christian? How does spiritual change help a person grow stronger during tests so that he or she is not destroyed by them?

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH (John 16:5–15)

Have you ever prayed, “Please, God, make me good!”? But then nothing changes. How is it possible for us to pray for God’s mighty power to work in our hearts, but then our lives stay the same? We know that God freely offers us the power to change our lives. We really want this change to happen, too. But then our lives don’t change in a way that matches what God offers us.

Why? The reason is simple. Yes, the Holy Spirit has the power to change us. But our own choices can limit what God can do for us.

Read John 16:5–15. In these verses, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit also is the “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13, NIV). What does the name “Spirit of truth” tell us about the Holy Spirit’s job of helping people?

The Holy Spirit shows us our sins. But He can’t force us to stop sinning. The Holy Spirit also can show us the most important Bible truth about God. But the Spirit can’t force us to believe or obey it. What if God forced us to do something? Then we are not free. Satan can then accuse God of forcing our minds and hearts to serve Him. Satan also can accuse God of “cheating” in the worldwide war between good and evil. When this war started in heaven, God the Father didn’t force Satan or any of the angels to believe that He was good. God didn’t force the angels to stop sinning. In the Garden of Eden, God warned Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. But God didn’t stop Eve and Adam from making the choice to disobey Him. God won’t act any different today with us. So, the Spirit shows us the Bible truth about God and sin. Then the Spirit says, “I showed you the truth. What will your answer be? What will you do now?”

The same thing happens when God gives us a difficult test in life. Sometimes God brings the test to our lives because we haven’t obeyed Him or because we haven’t stopped sinning. Do we want God to help us during this time? Then we must confess our sins and obey Him. Then God’s power can enter our hearts and change us.

What has the “Spirit of truth” said to you lately? How do you obey His words? What choices did you make this week?



**God didn’t stop
Eve and Adam
from making the choice
to disobey Him.**

THE GOD-HUMAN COMBINATION (Colossians 1:28, 29)

What is your biggest success? Chances are, you did not achieve this success simply by rolling out of bed one morning! If we want to achieve something important in life, we must work hard. Success takes time and effort. Our serving Jesus is no different.

Paul talks about God working in him. At the same time, what part does human effort have in Paul's success in the work he does for God? Read Colossians 1:28, 29 for the answer. Also read Deuteronomy 4:4; Luke 13:24; 1 Corinthians 9:25; and Hebrews 12:4.



These two words (“work” and “struggle”) show us a picture of an athlete working hard to win.

In Colossians 1:28 and 29, Paul talks about his work for God. He says that he works and fights hard to bring people to the Lord. But Paul says that God's power helps him to do this work.

The word written as “work” in Colossians 1:29, ERV, means to “grow tired” and “to work until you're too tired to do anymore work.” Writers in Paul's time used this word to talk about athletes during their training. The word written as “struggle [fight]” in Colossians 1:29, ERV, can mean to “suffer much.” So, these two words show us a picture of an athlete working hard to win. But then Paul adds another part to this picture, and that part is God. Yes, Paul fights and works hard with all that he has. But Paul also fights hard with everything God gives him. So, we see that Paul's work for God is done with God's strength. Yes, Paul uses his own personal effort and human strength. But he understands that real strength comes from God.

We live in a time when most people want more and more. But they want to work less to get it. Sad to say, this idea has come into Christianity, too. Some Christian preachers promise that all you need to do is believe in Jesus. Then God will pour the Holy Spirit on you. The Spirit will give you power to do miracles. But this teaching is only half true. It causes people to think that we just need to wait for God's power to change us. We don't need to do anything. We just need to sit back and wait for the change to happen!

What is your own experience with the struggle or the fight that Paul talks about? What are you fighting in your heart? How can you learn to let God lead you all the time?

SELF-DISCIPLINE (1 Peter 1:13)

God made us free to choose. One of the biggest enemies of our free choice is our own feelings. Every day the pictures in ads and the music all around us cause us to feel anger, fear, or to think about sex. Often, we feel and think these things without being aware of what's happening to us. How often do we think, "What do I want to eat for dinner?" "What do I want to do today?" "Do I feel good about buying this or that thing?" A lot, right? Feelings are a big part of our decision-making. Many feelings are not bad. But how I feel about something may have little to do with what is right or best. Our feelings can lie to us ("A human heart is more dishonest than anything else. It can't be healed. Who can understand it?" [Jeremiah 17:9, NIV]). Our feelings can cause us to have a false picture about life. Our feelings also can cause us to make bad choices. These choices can cause us to suffer.

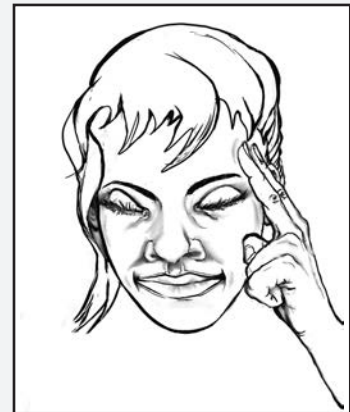
What examples can you find from the Bible of people who made choices because they were controlled by their feelings and not by Bible truth? Read examples of people who behaved this way: Genesis 3:6; 2 Samuel 11:2–4; Galatians 2:11, 12.

Read 1 Peter 1:13. What does Peter want his readers to do?

Peter understood that the mind controls the body. When we don't control our thoughts, we will be controlled by our feelings.

Make a picture in your mind of this story: you are walking on a road. The road is not wide. Along the road, you see there are many other roads. Each of these new roads lead in a different direction. Some of these roads go to places that we should not want to visit. Other roads look nice; they make us feel happy and free. If we walk on any of these roads, we will get off the correct road. Then we will get lost or go in the wrong direction. We will have trouble getting back on the right road after that.

What important choices do you need to make? Ask yourself, "How can I know if I'm making my choices because of my feelings or because of Bible truth?"



Peter understood that the mind controls the body.

GIVING EVERYTHING TO GOD (Matthew 5:29)

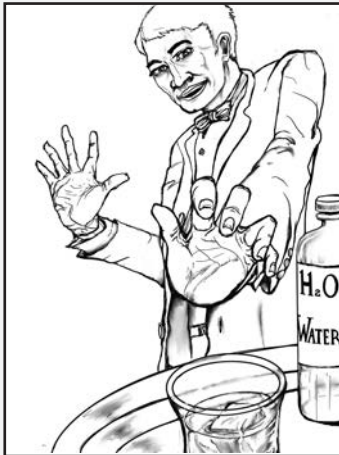
“If your right eye causes you to sin, poke it out and throw it away. Your eye is only one part of your body. It is better to lose an eye than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:29, NIV).

Think about the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:29 above. Do you think Jesus asks His followers to give up too much? Explain your answer.

Jesus asks us to give up only the things that are for our own good. Jesus does not ask us to give things up because He wants to make our lives difficult. Sometimes we need to take strong action because we have gotten so far away from God’s plans for us. People often ask, “How did I get so far away from God?” The answer is always the same: just one thought and one action at a time.

Read Matthew 5:29, 30. Jesus talks about sex sins in these verses. But Jesus gives us good advice about how to control other sins in our lives, too. We must follow these rules if we want to grow in Jesus.

What important idea does Jesus share with us in Matthew 5:29, 30? Is Jesus really asking us to poke out our eyes and cut off our hands?



When we make correct choices, we will become stronger.

Jesus isn’t asking us to hurt our bodies. Of course not! Jesus is really asking us to control our minds and bodies, no matter what. Do you see that the verses don’t say that God will remove the wish from our hearts to do wrong? Yes, sometimes God will remove this wish for us. But often God asks us to give up something first. Or He may ask us to start doing something that we don’t really want to do at all. That can be a hard test! When we make correct choices, we will become stronger. Then the wish to sin grows weaker in our lives.

God sometimes uses tests and suffering to get our attention. When we suffer, we often see how far we have gone away from God. Suffering may be God’s invitation to us to make a big change in life. Suffering also may help us see the wisdom in coming back to God’s plan for us.

NEVER GIVE UP (Genesis 32)

Read the story about Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32). What does this story say to us about not giving up, even when we feel discouraged?

We can know what is right and choose to do the right thing. But when we are under pressure, we may find that holding on to God and His promises is hard. That is why one of the important Christian strengths is never giving up.

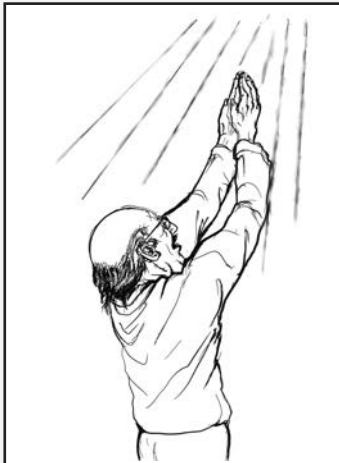
Jacob is one of the best examples in the Bible of not giving up. Jacob tricked his brother, Esau, and his father many years before. Jacob stole his brother's blessing (Genesis 27). Since that time, Jacob ran in fear of Esau, who wanted to kill him. Yes, God gave Jacob wonderful promises of His protection and blessings in a dream about a ladder that touched heaven. But Jacob felt scared anyway. Jacob wanted to know that God accepted him and was going to keep the promise made to him many years before. As Jacob fought Someone who was Jesus, Jacob's hip popped out of joint. The pain was so bad that Jacob stopped fighting. In terrible pain, Jacob held on to Jesus. Jesus said to Jacob, "Let me go. The sun is coming up" (Genesis 32:26, ERV). But Jacob won't let go until Jesus gives him His blessing.

Jacob's blessing came because he held on through the pain. The same thing happens for us. God also may pop our "hip" out of place. Then He will invite us to hang onto Him in our pain. God didn't remove the scars Jacob got from their wrestling match. Jacob continued to walk with a limp when he met his brother. On the outside, Jacob looked weak. But the limp showed that Jacob was strong enough to hold on to Jesus.

What are some choices you can make that will help you not to give up on the Lord when you feel hopeless and want to do wrong? These choices can include your friends, way of life, the books you read, your health habits, and your spiritual life.



Jacob's blessing came because he held on through the pain.



“If man wants God’s help, he must know his own weaknesses and needs.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Night of Wrestling,” pages 195–203, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; and “Consecration,” pages 43–48, in *Steps to Christ*.

“God made men free to choose. When man sinned, he put his freedom to choose under Satan’s control. Since that time, Satan has worked hard to trick humans into doing what he wants them to do. Satan works to destroy humans and to make their lives unhappy and miserable.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, page 515, adapted.

“If man wants God’s help, he must know his own weaknesses and needs. God wants to change man in a mighty way. Man must work hard to change. Man must pray and not give up. He must give up wrong habits. Man will win the war against himself only if he works hard to correct his problems and do what is right. Many people never become what God wants them to be. Why? Because they wait for God to do for them the work that He gives them the power to do. All who become useful in this life must be trained by strict discipline. Yes, they must strictly train their minds and hearts to do what is right. God will help them. God will join His mighty power with human effort.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 248, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How will looking at Jesus help us understand better how much we need God’s loving favor and mercy?
- ② Read the story about Jesus in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–42). What were Jesus’ own feelings and wishes? How were these different from what God wanted Him to do? What can we learn from Jesus’ example?
- ③ As a class, talk about the things in our community that can make us weak and leave us open to Satan’s attacks. What can we do to help other church members be aware of these dangers? Also, how can we help people who feel the need for help?
- ④ Do you know someone in your church who hasn’t been there for a long time? Maybe this person is ready to give up, or already has. What can you do as a group to encourage this person? How can you help him or her to continue to trust in Jesus?

PART 6: TEMPLE PLAN STOPPED

Evil spirits did not want Father to go to his son's baptism. So, Father refused to accept the invitation. On the baptism day, Father felt no peace. He asked Mother to drive him to the Candomblé temple in Manaus, Brazil. At 5:00 P.M., the spirits told Father to dress in the special clothes he wore as top priest, or chief religious leader. Then the spirits told Father to go to Junior's church. The spirits planned to take control of several people in the church to stop Junior from being baptized.

Father put on his special clothes. Then he took a taxi to the church. Father heard the evil spirits all around him. At the church's front door, the spirits announced that they weren't going in. Father remembered the most important lesson the spirits taught him years earlier: don't leave a job undone. If Father started a task, he must finish it. So, Father entered the church. A holy energy poured over him. He never felt anything the same as this energy before. The energy made Father feel good. Later, Father understood this energy was the Holy Spirit.

Father stopped feeling angry. A church leader named Roberto Fernandez met Father at the back of the church. Roberto gave Father a hug and led him to the pool where Junior waited to be baptized. Father looked at the church members. Their heads were bowed. Father thought they had their heads down because they were afraid. But later he learned they were praying. When Father saw Junior in the pool, Father knew that the spirits lied to him. Junior wasn't being forced to join the Adventist Church. Junior joined the church because he wanted to.

After a song, Pastor Ricardo raised his arm up to heaven. He said, "As a preacher of the Good News, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen." Then Pastor Ricardo lowered Junior under the water.

After the baptism, Junior announced, "Daddy, we may have different religions. But I love you very much." Junior hugged his father and started to cry. His words touched Father's heart.

When the baptism was done, church members hugged Father. Father was so surprised. He didn't expect anyone to be so nice to him. "This church is a nice place. The people are nice, too," he said as he got into the car.

Back home, Father called everyone to announce with pride that his son had been baptized. He said the experience was wonderful. Mother understood that the Holy Spirit was working on Father's heart. Peace filled their home for four days. Then the evil spirits ordered Father to kill Junior and Mother.

Your 13th Sabbath Offering will help build eight churches in South America. Four of these churches will be built in Brazil, where Father (Eduardo Ferreira dos Santos) and his family live.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



"Daddy, we may have different religions. But I love you very much."