

# Reflections by the Pond

WRITINGS OF DAVID S. LAMPEL



# proclivities

In the world at large, change is a constant. The natural world, the societal world, communities, architecture, fads and fashion—they all exist in a state of irrepressible change.

Individuals change, as well. A friend recently remarked at the profusion and dark color of my hair in an '80s-vintage photo. Sadly my pate, once a dense rain forest, is now a parched savanna.

Though we may no longer look as we did thirty-five years ago, though the circumference of our midsection modulates from season to season and year to year, though our desires and passions have steadily e- or devolved with the decades—though the child inevitably becomes a youth and the youth becomes an adult, there is one thing about every one of us that does not change.

So long as man and woman tread the soil of this earth they remain of sinful flesh.

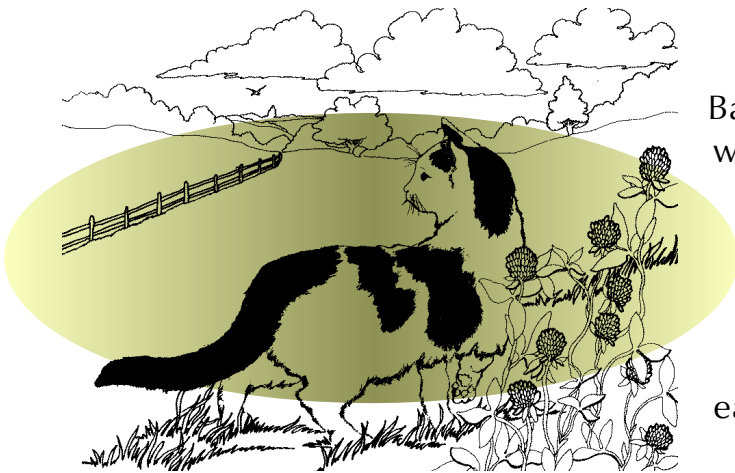
Issue #814, February 2018

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# instinctive behavior

Twenty-two years after her death, we still miss the extraordinary female cat that came with the purchase of our house twenty-seven years ago. Mamma—so named because she was pregnant at the time—was a singular blend of wildness and domesticity. She could absent herself for one or two weeks at a time whenever she felt the urge to go walk-about. Yet upon her return she would lavish upon us the warmth and affection of a pampered house cat. Mamma had the predatory agility to nail two birds at once, yet she possessed an intelligent, loving personality.



Back in those early days, in the winter, when the temperatures began to slide closer to zero and the wind chill shoved the discomfort level even further south, it was our practice to permit Mamma to come into the house. Our philosophy, since our earliest days in California, had always

been that outdoor animals stay out, and indoor animals stay in; they do not come and go. But when winter strikes in the heartland of America, certain concessions must be made.

During the warmer months, Mamma was perfectly content to stay outside. But cats, like most people, aren't terribly thrilled with the cold, preferring a warm blanket over a snow bank. So soon she was asking to come inside.

As a consequence, during the winter Mamma became domestic. She slept on the sofa next to the fireplace, she methodically cleaned herself until she smelled almost as good as the indoor cats, and she consumed a reliable if monotonous diet of dry cat food. She would rub and purr and play through the house with the other girls—generally letting them win, although with her street smarts and tree-climbing strength she was perfectly capable of whipping any or all of them.

But in the final analysis it was mostly a temporary charade she was putting on,

performed in exchange for a few month's warmth and comfort. She was not *really* becoming domestic at all. When the weather began to turn back to temperatures above freezing, when the warming sunlight would pour into the sun room and melt the drifts of snow outside, Mamma begged to return to her more customary haunts. And instantly she would return to her natural state: predator.

Mamma only humored us by consuming the dry Cat Chow during the cold months. With the offer of warmer outside temps and an opened door, she happily turned her back on the full bowl without a moment's notice, for what she really craved was raw flesh—preferably rabbits, but mice and birds would do nicely, thank you very much. Whatever the creature, she would consume all of it—from toe to ear, from tip to tail. And there was no dissuading her; we could offer all manner of enticements, but when she was on the scent, she possessed a level of determination and concentration of singular intensity.



Mamma's natural, instinctive behavior is a reminder that no matter how hard I try—no matter how civilized I become, I will always be a child of depravity.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

*Romans 7:18-20*

Righteousness and purity go against the nature of flesh, even as our inherent nature rails against God's righteousness. We are born of the mud, and some of it still clings to us no matter how long we soak in the spiritual bath. Even under the blood of Christ, I may still revisit old, natural habits—habits I would rather put away for good. But they periodically rear their unsightly visage, injecting themselves back into a life that would prefer that they just go away once and for all. I have the *promise* of their eventual demise, but that day has not yet arrived.

But it will.

There will come a day when I will no longer be a child of this earth. There will come a day when I will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And I shall finally, *praise God!*, be like Him.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

*Philippians 3:20-21*

# a wretched condition



It has long been my lament that God in His wisdom did not include ascension and resurrection along with salvation, that in the moment that we are regenerated, converted from a being of solely flesh to a spiritual being residing in flesh, He would also lift us from this earth and into His literal, heavenly presence.

Oh, how much easier and pleasant life would be if that were the case. To not be limited in our worship to imagining His throne, but to bow down in worship before His *actual* throne. To rejoice with the redeemed in a new and perfect body void of any and all disease, injury, weakness. To never again feel the dull ache of loss, the sting of regret, the debilitating shame of sin.

But in His sovereign wisdom, for His perfect reasons, God has determined that regeneration does not immediately open the portal to heaven, but grants instead to the individual believer the *promise* of heaven. That day will indeed come, but for most of us not right away. There

will be assigned to us many days, many more years upon this earth. For the one who comes to Christ as a youngster this will probably mean many decades of spiritual life in constant struggle against the Siren song but leaden weight of the flesh.



The apostle Paul paints an alarmingly familiar picture of what life is like, left in this bifurcated condition.

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

It can be a jarring revelation for the new Christian to hear the venerable author of much of the New Testament declare so honestly—and note the verb tense throughout this passage—that even as a disciple of Christ Jesus he remains “of flesh.” Because of this, because of the heritage of Adam in Eden, this flesh is

“sold into bondage to sin.”

This is how we are born. It is the legacy, to this day, of Adam’s rebellion against a holy God.

The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

*Isaiah 24:4-6*

Pay no heed to a society that declares in its ignorance, or calculating deceit, that we are born innocent, pure, righteous. It is a lie from the tormented bowels of hell. We are born with the blood of our father Adam—his rebellion, his lying, his anger. Need proof? Go live with a teenager who has been raised with no parental guidance or discipline. Absent any instruction for good, which way does he go on his own? What is his natural inclination? That young man will be, at the least, self-centered and self-absorbed. He will want everything *his* way, and if things do not go his way, he will blame

everyone but himself.

Just like his forbear Adam.

Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” [Adam] said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.”

*Genesis 3:9-12*



The pull of our fallen flesh is insidious and persistent.

For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.

Is there any Christian in the world who has not experienced this frustration voiced—either for himself, or as “every man”—by the apostle Paul? In our heart and soul,

in our mind we *want* to do good, to *be* good, to live righteously. But then that desire is not always evidenced in our behavior. We do not *want* to sin, but then we do. We want to live obediently to our Lord and Savior, but then we do not.

Paul’s conclusion was that this sorry state of affairs was because sin still had a home inside him—in fact, in him there was *nothing* that was good.

So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

How does he know this? How is he able to draw this conclusion? Ironically, he identifies the presence of sin in his flesh by means of the auspices of God’s indwelling Holy Spirit! Just as the Mosaic Law, given by God Himself, defined and revealed sin, it is the Spirit—again, given by God—who informs us of our fleshly condition, testifying to the absence of any righteousness in our natural selves.

Beyond that, the apostle knows it in the



same way we know: experientially. We live with this agonizing, maddening situation day in and day out.

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

We *know* we are redeemed. We *know* that in Christ we are justified before a holy God. But still we sin against Him. It is enough to drive one mad! We hear our mind and our spirit crying out with the tormented Luther, "Oh, my sin! My sin! My sin!" We yearn, we plead for holiness, but time and again our flesh, with its base desires, seems always to prevail.

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

This is our condition at times: wretched. There are days we feel almost *entombed* by our flesh. There are days, ironically often immediately after a spiritual high, when it feels as if that "roaring lion," Sa-

tan, has sniffed out our godly ecstasy and come to devour it, to eradicate it, to squash it like a bug. That old serpent cannot permit the righteous fruit of the Spirit to stand, so he pulls out every trick from his voodoo bag to squelch it. And suddenly our rejoicing is turned to despair as we are overwhelmed with doubts and temptations.

It can feel like death.  
Spiritual death.

It is reported that near Tarsus, where Saul was born, a tribe of people lived who inflicted a most terrible penalty upon a murderer. They fastened the body of the victim to that of the killer, tying shoulder to shoulder, back to back, thigh to thigh, arm to arm, and then drove the murderer from the community. So tight were the bonds that he could not free himself, and after a few days the death in the body communicated itself to the living flesh of the murderer. As he stalked the land, there was none to help him. He had only the frightful prospect of gangrenous death. He could well cry in horror, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Donald Grey Barnhouse

But we are *not* dead. The Spirit is *not* dead to us. We have *not* lost faith, but our faith has been momentarily overwhelmed by the base desires of our flesh.

This is not the same as the contrast between the regenerate and unregenerate; it is not the same as the difference between the saved and unsaved. The unregenerate do not feel the anguish of sin, for it is their natural, customary condition. To the unsaved and uncalled, sin feels right. Only those in possession of the Holy Spirit feel the anguish from sinning against a holy God.



So then, what is the answer to this maddening conflict?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

*Romans 7:14-18, 21-25*

The answer begins, not surprisingly, with Christ, and accepting the fact that this

conflict will persist, in varying degrees, until the day we meet Jesus face to face. It begins not just with the future *hope* we have in Christ, the promise of a glorified eternal life with Him, but with the promise we have in Him in the here and now.

## adam's legacy

There is almost certainly a limitless number of ways to illustrate this cumbersome, contrary union of flesh and Spirit in the believer. I observe one presently outside my library window.

It has been snowing all day; lovely, cleansing, beautifying snow. Earlier this same day the scene outside my window was a dull, dirty beige of dried grass, soil, and barren trees. But now everything on the other side of the glass is draped in a soft blanket of white—about five inches of fluffy snow. Everything is clean and

bright, once again pretty. But I know very well that scattered across the front lawn, and the ground in front of the barn—beneath the white snow and below the surface of the lawn—moles and gophers are busy tunneling, creating upraised ridges in the lawn, and throwing up splotches of raw earth here and there, destroying the integrity and beauty of the grass. On the surface right now everything is clean and bright, smooth and lovely, but below that pristine surface the destructive forces remain hard at work.





Every week Christians go to their respective church buildings to worship and be taught from God's word. Though we are fast becoming dinosaurs, some of us still put on our Sunday best, our "Sunday-go-to-meet'n clothes," to attend. We look pretty good on the outside, in our church garb, and often much better than we do during the rest of the week. Some of us look downright righteous—even saintly.

For some of us, however, the outward garb of Sunday morning covers over the destructive forces still churning away inside. Donald Grey Barnhouse offers us another illustration, painting a graphic picture of what lies inside every believer.

Even though the believer can live in triumph over eruptions of sin, the old carnal nature is still within, contaminating everything. Suppose sewage is carried away in a wooden flume which passes [over] a clear-flowing spring. The flume loses a board, and the sewage pours into the spring, thoroughly contaminating it. Its waters become unsafe to drink.

That "flume of sewage" is present within every Christian—it is called our Adamic

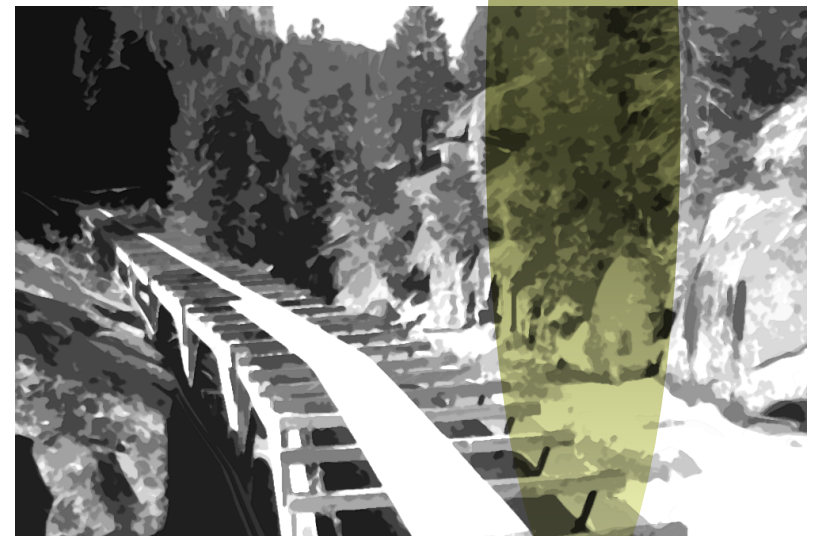
nature, the result of original sin entering the blood flow of every human being born on this earth, passed down generation after generation since the first couple rebelled against their Maker.

Even within the fellowship of believers that flume is in varying states of repair. In some it is kept in solid condition: when any board begins to weaken, it is immediately repaired, keeping the sewage contained. In others the boards in the flume are less well maintained, being replaced only after they have completely rotted and fallen away, spilling gallons of sewage into the spring. The Christian's purpose should be to keep that flume in excellent, strong condition. Even so, as Barnhouse points out, there is still seepage.

That flume and its sewage are within every one of us. Even though no boards come off to foul the spring, there is always seepage; this keeps the [spring] water from having the unmixed perfection of Jesus Christ, which we shall possess only in heaven. When technicians analyze the water of natural ponds, lakes, and springs, they

never find it completely sterile. Although it may be fit for human use, every analyst reports traces of contamination.

That is pretty depressing news. We could be forgiven for wondering, "So what is the advantage in being a Christian? What difference does Christ make in my life if I am still as polluted with sin as the next guy?"



# then and now

It is not the absence of sin but the grieving over it which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors.

*A. W. Pink*

Every human being has and will sin against a holy God. It is how we are made; it is fixed in our DNA.

Those who have rejected Jesus the Christ as Savior don't acknowledge their sin, or don't care that they sin, or helplessly struggle against their sin. If they care, their efforts are ultimately futile, for they haven't the means by which to do battle with the Tempter. Beyond that, they have no hope for eternity; without Christ their eternity will consist of unending torment.

Instead of eternal life, they will have eternal dying.

Children of God by the blood of Christ Jesus, however, are granted the means by which to do battle against sin. In Barnhouse's illustration, the Christian can keep the "flume of sewage" in good repair. But before that is even put into practice, they are given hope—certainty—of an eternity in the embrace of the Father and Son, a *sinless* eternity of rejoicing before the throne of holy God.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

*Philippians 3:20-21*



There will come a day for every believer when this cursed flesh will be discarded and replaced, giving each of us a brand new, glorified body fit for heaven.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on

the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

*1 Corinthians 15:50-53*

But faith supplies more than just a promise for the future, for the believer's eternal life with God begins not at physical death, but at the moment he or she answers the call of the Holy Spirit and becomes a follower of Christ. When we answer that call in the affirmative, the Spirit takes up residence. Supernaturally, immediately, astonishingly we now carry around with us very God!

That Presence *wants* us to live a holy life, a life of righteousness in which sin no longer reigns. And He does not stop at lending us active assistance and encouragement in our battle with sin, but also interprets for us the deep mysteries in God's word regarding this ironic duality of sinful flesh cohabiting with holy God.

It is there, in God's word and with the Spirit's help, we discover the answers we need.

# rejecting defeat

**I**f you are reading this, your soul is not yet in heaven, nor has Christ yet returned to grant every believer, living and dead, a new, glorified body. If you are reading this, you are still encumbered by, and doing battle with, the flesh and its legacy of sin.

The aftershocks continuing to emanate from Eden will always be there in the Christian life. This side of glory every believer will fall short of holiness; he will miss the mark. But that is not to say we are to accept and give ourselves over to a life of disobedience; to that the apostle Paul vehemently declared, "May it never be!" And take heart: Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit have not left us to engage this battle on our own. God's word reveals the weapons and tactics available to every Christian.

## Embracing New Ownership

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

*2 Corinthians 5:16-17*

This fallen world rejects the cold truth that just as every person ever born is immortal, bound for an eternity either in heaven or hell, so too every person ever born is the slave of a master. But since the unsaved world sees even the cross of Christ as utter foolishness, we will not take counsel with it.

We are born slaves of unrighteousness, slaves of and to sin.

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

*Romans 6:16-18*

Slavery to sin brings only pain. Oh, we may have found a bit of fleshly pleasure here and there, but it always, like the morning after a drunken binge, ended badly. Before we came to Christ, we had no say in our servitude: we were slaves to our Adamic birthright, and the only means at hand to break free of that damnable servitude was to claim a new Master. Jesus said that any “house divided against itself will not stand,” so flesh cannot successfully do battle against flesh. While we were slaves to sin—and you were; don’t believe the world’s lie that you were “free”—we had no weapon against temptation, and no avenue of escape save a new Master.

At the moment of conversion we

gained that new Master. Claiming Christ as Lord means claiming His cross, and it was at His cross that we were purchased by and for Him.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

Unlike slavery to sin, slavery to righteousness—that is, slavery to Father God and His Son, Jesus—brings not fleeting pleasure, but lasting, enduring joy. And whenever we forget that we now have a new Master, a new allegiance, and give in to fleshly sin, some of that joy slips away.

## Agreement

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

*1 John 1:9*

After embracing our righteous Master, the first line of defense against insidious sin in our life is to keep it small—to not let

it percolate and grow until it overwhelms us, or worse, let it become so familiar and comfortable that we believe the lie that it is acceptable behavior.

God has invented this wonderful mechanism for dealing with sin in a believer’s life. It is called “confession.” It is really quite simple: before God we agree that what He calls sin, we call sin, and that our recent behavior *is* sin. No excuses, no rationalizing, no whining about how unfair it all is.

For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.  
Against You, You only, I have sinned  
And done what is evil in Your sight,  
So that You are justified when You speak  
And blameless when You judge.

*Psalms 51:3-4*



**This is one of the sorest trials of a renewed life, that it is built over dark dungeons, where dead things may be buried but not forgotten, and where through open grating rank vapours still ascend.**

*John Ker*

Sin is spiritual cancer in a believer's life. Left unattended it grows, it expands, it insinuates itself into every nook and cranny, corrupting everything it touches. More devious than the physical disease, spiritual cancer actively tricks us into believing it is *not* disease, but actually rather a good thing. It claims to be health and vitality and freedom, even as it eats away at our very spirit and soul.

Sin is a liar, because the one deploying the temptations that invite sin is the inventor and father of lies. Jesus, replying to some of the Jewish leaders, said,

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

*John 8:44*

Instead of listening to the lies and permitting the cancer to have free rein throughout our system, we are to quickly confess the sin—even the contemplation to give in to the temptation—to stop it cold in its tracks. Relinquish the burden of sin, and with King David, pray,

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity  
And cleanse me from my sin...

Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be  
clean;

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than  
snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness,  
Let the bones which You have broken  
rejoice.

Hide Your face from my sins

And blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from Your presence  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation  
And sustain me with a willing spirit.

*Psalms 51:2, 7-12*

True repentance is easier when sin is addressed and confessed while still in its childish youth. Much harder is turning away from sin that has become old and gray and set in its ways, sin that has become a familiar companion and comfortable friend.

## Looking Up Instead of Out

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things

above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

*Colossians 3:1-5*

Some times, sadly, we go looking for trouble. And if we look for it, more often than not we find it.

We need not go looking for temptation; we live in a world where it comes looking for us. The only way to avoid it (almost) entirely is to live out one's days as a hermit in an isolated cave. But the Lord did not call us to that, so another way to minimize the Siren song of sin is to so fill our lives with so much of God that there is no room left for evil.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

*Galatians 5:16-17*

There is no better way to describe this than with the chorus of the traditional old hymn by Helen H. Lemmel:

***Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow  
strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.***

That is it precisely. When we keep our gaze and our focus on our loving Savior; when we seek His company and His counsel every day; when we permit His Spirit to fill us, empower us, nurture us—when we do all of that and more, there is no room left in our life for temptation and sin.

The goal is to make sin so foreign, such an uncomfortable alien presence, that we avoid it as much as the unsaved avoid a holy God. Sin should become such a cloyingly repulsive invader of our joy and peace in Christ, that we run from it like someone fleeing the jaws of a ravenous beast.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

*1 Peter 5:8*

## **Victory!**

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*1 Corinthians 15:55-57*

Finally, throughout all of this the believer can lift up praise and thanksgiving to God for even the smallest victory over sin in his life. Righteousness carries its own reward; daily fellowship with our

Savior is its own blessing; and every victory over the base nature we inherited from our corporate father, Adam, is an opportunity to lift our gaze once again to the cross, from which every triumph over sin comes. There we are reminded of the once and final sacrifice made by our Savior, and His outpouring of grace.

Sin in the life of a follower of Christ may, from time to time, be an encumbrance, but it will never be a barrier to His grace. ♦

**Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

*Romans 6:12-14*