

# LIVING *in* VICTORY

*Through  
the Power  
of Mercy*

STEVE GALLAGHER

*To Doug & Millie Detert  
who taught me through their own lives  
the meaning of God's Mercy.*

**LIVING IN VICTORY: THROUGH THE POWER OF MERCY**

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INTRODUCTION

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VICTORY...THE VERY WORD can almost seem like a cruel joke to someone bound up in habitual sin. Most strugglers I know would be thrilled just to live in some degree of liberty from their sexual sin; an abundant spiritual life seeming far-fetched, even ludicrous. My goal is to show the reader that he need not settle for a fear-driven, white-knuckled form of freedom. As a child of God, the bountiful life of victory in Christ is his for the taking!

The problem is convincing a man who has a defeated attitude that he can have so much more than what he has experienced up to this point. It is much the same with trying to tell a man living in the ghetto, making minimum wage, that he should live lavishly. He will look at you as though you have two heads! He has lived in the slums his entire life. He has worked for little pay for years. He might vaguely know that there are those who are wealthy, but that kind of lifestyle is so far from his little world that it is inconceivable that he could ever enjoy it for himself.

Most strugglers would consider themselves victorious if they could find freedom from that one besetting habit. Yet, would that truly make the man victorious? What has really been accomplished if a sex addict no longer frequents massage parlors but is still consumed with lust? Is he truly rich in Christ if he is still selfish, angry and prideful? Does he really know about victorious living if he does

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not know what it means to live in the power and love of God?

If the man making minimum wage suddenly doubles his pay, it may seem as though he is rich, but it does not make it so. Undoubtedly, his situation has improved. Perhaps he might even be able to move out of the projects and into a better neighborhood.

However, if he wants to become rich, he will have to aspire to more than a raise in pay and a slightly nicer house. He will have to change his entire outlook on life from one of poverty to one of wealth. He will need to become an avid student of the lives of the rich. Most of all, he will need to master the *operating principles of success* that govern the business world.

It is much the same for the person who desires to exchange his defeated spiritual life for one of victory. He too must set his sights much higher than he has in the past. He will also need to study the lives of those who have lived the abundant Christian life. Most of all, he will need to master the *operating principles of success* that open up to him the spiritual fortune available to the believer. Why should any Christian wallow in the ghetto of defeated living when the treasures of Christ are available to him?

The riches, which bring about victorious living, are not the material, temporal trinkets this world system offers, but are found in the unsearchable depths of God Himself. Paul tells us that the Lord is rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4), and as it turns out, that mercy is the very thing the struggling saint needs.

Everything in the kingdom of God revolves around the love and mercy of the Lord. In fact, His love is the *operating principle* that runs the entire kingdom of God. Jesus expressed this when He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." In other words, everything that occurs within the realm of God's kingdom revolves around these two principles.

In the same way engineers empower an entire city by harnessing and directing electricity, so too the kingdom of God operates on the power of His love. Mercy is the love of God in action



## INTRODUCTION

meeting the needs of people. It is a force that continually issues forth from His throne and is directed at those in need.

The secret to victorious living is to tap into God's great storehouse of mercy for one's own needs and then act as a conduit for that power, directing it toward the lives of others. Overcoming habitual sin is important, but real victory occurs when a person becomes a weapon in the hands of a powerful God against the legions of hell. That is *Living in Victory!*

The first step into this higher life is seeing your need for it.



## OUT OF THE CLOUDS, INTO REALITY

**O**NE OF THE MOST disturbing experiences I have ever encountered in ministry happened in my Pure Life office a few years ago. I doubt if I will ever forget the look on Carl's face as he burst through my door and threw himself on the floor.

Carl was a very gifted singing evangelist. Over several years, he had developed a regular circuit of churches he ministered in throughout the South. Not only was he a talented singer, but he was also a charismatic preacher. He learned that people like "positive sermons," so he was always careful to leave congregations feeling good about themselves. People loved Carl's uplifting personality. No wonder pastors were happy to have him return year after year. For over 20 years he did just that, traveling from church to church, raising his family in a motor home.

At first, Carl was sincere. He originally entered the ministry out of a true desire to serve the Lord. As time went on, however, his dependence on God waned as he unconsciously relied on his own abilities. Carl learned how to look spiritual and impress congregations. People admired him and he knew it.

Eventually, he fell away from God. His Bible study ceased to be for his personal edification and became times to find sermon material. Having long since given up any kind of meaningful prayer life, a corruption took over inside that gradually manifested itself in

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his preaching. No longer willing to confront sin, Carl pandered a sugarcoated gospel. He considered himself an encourager, someone who makes you glad to be a Christian. In his mind, success was proof of God's blessing on his life.

Eventually, his weak spiritual condition caught up with him and he had a string of affairs with women in various churches. He came to Pure Life Ministries' live-in facility when his sin was exposed.

He was there only a few days when he had a life-defining moment out on the prayer trail behind the office. He was walking along when he suddenly had an encounter with God that left him devastated. What happened next will forever be etched in my mind.

Carl lay on the floor of my office screaming. The Lord had just revealed to him, in a way that only God can, that his 20 years of ministry had all been for himself. From the earliest days, he sought glory for himself, not God. He preached congregation-pleasing sermons, not what the Lord told him to preach. He went to places guaranteeing good offerings, not where the Lord directed him to go. In one instant of time, Carl saw that he had used his gifts and abilities for his own selfish gain. He realized that all of his work in ministry was empty and devoid of substance. In that moment, he saw a lifetime of service in the kingdom of God that had produced no fruit, no real results, and no eternal rewards. It was all for nothing. For one moment in a Kentucky hayfield, reality invaded Carl's make-believe, Pollyanna world. That sobering revelation was the only thing that saved him.

### **SPIRITUAL AMATEURS**

Carl is the by-product of a system that has become strongly entrenched within the Church: a form of religion that resembles the real thing but is altered just enough to make it palatable for those unwilling to walk the narrow path of real Christianity. It peddles a counterfeit presentation of the gospel based on feelings rather than faith. This false version of Christianity is promoted by professional pitchmen who, like Carl, have become popular, not because of spiritual maturity, but because they instinctively know how to give

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people what they want.

Traveling evangelists aren't alone in propagating this emotionally based faith. Many pastors have built huge churches on the same kind of hype. Pastor Pete will serve as a good illustration of this type of minister. He leads a sprawling, big-city church full of ceaseless, bounding, jubilant activity. Such an atmosphere is a reflection of his own nature. Pete is, and has always been, positive, gregarious, fun loving, and uplifting to be around. When you attend one of his services nearly everything you hear will be positive: sermons about what God wants to do for you, testimonies about what God has done, and a worship service that resembles a Super Bowl victory party.

What's wrong with that? Am I against Christian enthusiasm? Absolutely not! I agree with those who ask the question, "Why do some believers get hysterical over a football game and yet refuse to show excitement over God?" I believe there is a place for genuine exuberance over our wonderful Savior and what He has done for us.

The problem with Pastor Pete's church is that when we peek behind the wall of outward exuberance and fluff, there is nothing there! The mature, discerning Christian sadly discovers that this church has no substance. The hope being peddled is not attached to a real knowledge of or dependence upon God, but rather upon a super-inflated climate of enthusiasm that is not allowed to dwindle. Consequently, this man's greatest fear is not that he could possibly be leading his flock astray, but rather that if he ever allowed the enthusiasm to die, all of his followers would quickly desert him for another church "where God is moving."

The Christian life is not meant to be lived continuously at a fever pitch. Being lost in the exhilaration of God's love or a mountaintop revelation of what He is like can be wonderfully encouraging in a believer's spiritual journey. Nevertheless, Christian growth usually comes from fighting through the thick foliage of life's problems down on the jungle floor, where true godly character is built and where the maturing believer learns what it means to live by faith in God.

Pastor Pete only has a superficial understanding of God, so

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it is all he can offer his congregation. In reality, he can shepherd them no further along the path than he has traveled in his own spiritual life. Since he has always been able to get by on his winsome personality, optimistic outlook, and energetic nature, he has never felt his need for anything deeper in God. Indeed, Pastor Pete learned early that his charismatic gifts made him a “natural-born leader,” nullifying his need to cultivate the godly authority that comes from living in dependence on God. Simply put, Pastor Pete does not need God in order to attract followers.

Pastor Pete’s quick smile and unceasing motion generates enthusiasm in others. A glance below the surface exposes some real problems in his ministry and in his personal life. The pseudo-mountain-top experiences he tries to produce for his followers are conceived out of his own wishful thinking. At some point in his walk with the Lord, Pete may have witnessed awesome manifestations of God’s power in others. However, rather than seeking a genuine, personal experience with God, he is content to have a ministry full of zeal but lacking any real knowledge or spiritual weightiness. It is inevitable that every church service becomes a well choreographed, cheerleading event attempting to keep his congregation (i.e. spectators) electrified in an effort to maintain a high level of crowd-pleasing interest.

Instead of receiving the staples of a healthy spiritual diet, establishing the natural spiritual growth that occurs in a well-fed, maturely pastored congregation, church members receive a constant diet of cotton candy and marshmallow fluff, supplying a temporary burst of energy, but ultimately leaving them sorely malnourished. What else is expected from a man who has spent his entire Christian life omitting the primary elements of a well-balanced diet—the meat of being convicted by God’s Word, the vegetables of discipline, the potatoes of sacrifice, the salad of adversity. He likes dessert and imagines that he and others can live on it all of the time. Thus, his church body resembles a drug addict who keeps himself going artificially while in reality starving his body of the proper nutrition needed to promote growth and sustain life.

Pastor Pete’s lack of true, spiritual leadership shows not only



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in the pulpit, but also in his pastoral counseling. When approached by people needing real answers, Pastor Pete lends a sympathetic ear, gives a cheerful word of encouragement, says a fervent-sounding prayer, and ends with a reassuring slap on the back. Initially, the poor seeker feels uplifted for about 10 minutes before a bewildering sense of hopelessness sets in. Naturally, he has a difficult time understanding how such a word and prayer of encouragement could leave him feeling so confused and hopeless. What this hurting man needs is godly counsel from a pastor who has a sincere concern, truly understands his troubles, and prays with authority.

Unfortunately, a meeting with this pastor would disappoint just about anyone with a real need. Pete does not understand the various dilemmas of life many people face because he does not face his own. Compassion does not well up within him because he relies on sentiment and emotional responses to the pain of others. He offers no spiritual insight because he has never acquired the wisdom that comes to the person who has survived the dark night of the soul. He prays fervently but without power. His prayers are the emotional chatter of a frivolous man, not the God-moving, earnest pleas of an authentic intercessor. He talks about the life of victory, but his idea of what constitutes such a life is nothing but exaggerated statements that contain no spiritual reality. Consequently, the seeker leaves with no answers, no help, and no hope.

Pastor Pete has a very serious problem: his experience with God is extremely shallow. Thus, he remains superficial and immature, with nothing of substance to offer other people.

### **FAULTY FOUNDATION**

Carl and Pete are spiritual amateurs who have no business being in positions of spiritual leadership. Since they lack personally meaningful relationships with God, they certainly cannot effectively represent Him to others in need. Moreover, their lack of true concern about other people deadens any possibility of real intercession at the throne of grace on behalf of those they are called to serve. Unfortunately, these two men typify the kind of spiritual leadership that is active in much of the Church.



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Ostensibly, the message given by “hype peddlers” such as Carl and Pete is that people should put their faith in God. However, close examination of their teachings reveals that they are really instructing people to base their faith on the faulty foundation of a positive mental attitude rather than on the Rock of Ages. This skewed interpretation of Christianity produces temporary results for those whose mental outlook is buoyant by nature, but leaves the rest of Christendom feeling hopeless and defeated. These pseudo-ministers proclaim an unspoken message that victorious Christians are those who can regularly maintain their enthusiasm. They promote the idea that those who excel in the faith are the ones who can stimulate excitement in others.

The whole mess reminds me of the motivational meetings I was required to periodically attend as a real estate agent. First, leading sales associates offered testimonies of how they landed big contracts through persistent efforts. Next, a company leader gave the troops a stirring talk. The highlight of the get-together came when top salesmen were acknowledged for their efforts. The whole purpose of the meeting was to incite passion in the troops to sell more houses in the upcoming months.

The correlation between the two systems is remarkably similar. The “hype movement” (for lack of a better term) also has its testimonies of victory. Those who know how to inflame a crowd deliver stimulating sermons. Leading adherents to the movement are recognized as powerful men of God. It is easy to see why their methods are so successful at attracting followers. Instead of being humbled by a lack of godly characteristics, people are encouraged to see spirituality in the most optimistic light possible. Paul’s warning that a person should not “...think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment...” (Romans 12:3) fall on deaf ears because these followers are encouraged to carry an inflated view of personal piety. Meanwhile, any suggestion that they are exaggerating what they really have in Christ is often viewed as an attack from the devil.

Since these people think they are doing so well spiritually, they do not press into God, consecrate themselves, or deal seriously



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with the sin of the heart. Having been blinded by spiritual pride about the true condition of their souls, they do not see the need to do such things. They do not see their spiritual lack but see themselves as lacking nothing. In short, there is no need to be concerned about maturing in the faith because they are already at the top!

If Jesus addressed one of these power meetings today, perhaps He would say something along these lines: “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...” (Revelation 3:17) They do not see what they truly are because they are taught not to see.

### COMING TO GOD

Jesus once told a story about two men who went into the temple for the purpose of having an audience with God. The first, a religious leader, prayed: “God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.”

By today’s outward standards, this man lived a godly life: praying, fasting, tithing, and abstaining from obvious, visible sin. He carefully gave God all the credit for the success he achieved. It is interesting to note that when he purveyed his life, everything he saw about himself was positive! I could see him easily fitting in with those who live in the realm of the hype movement.

The approach of the other man was quite different: “But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’” This man did not march into the throne room of God and demand an audience. In fact, he stood off in the distance, unwilling even to look up at the Lord. Standing in the presence of the King, he was overwhelmed by his own unworthiness. His sins stood out glaringly in his mind as he bowed in the presence of the Holy One. He was sorrowful over his lack of Christ-likeness, ashamed at how little he had done for God. He stood there looking for one thing: mercy.

In today’s upbeat church atmosphere, someone might suggest



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that this man needs to be reassured about “who he is in Christ,” that he needs to accept God’s love, and learn how to forgive himself. Some might even berate him for his negative attitude, labeling him as someone living a defeated life, a spiritual loser.

It’s interesting how heaven’s perspectives can be different from earth’s. Jesus said, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14)

### **THE PROPER PROGNOSIS**

The issue is not so much the way a person prays but whether or not he truly has a clear understanding of his own need. If he sees himself in the proper light, he approaches God with a humble spirit. On the other hand, if he pumps himself up to be something that he isn’t, he will attempt to storm heaven in spiritual arrogance and presumption. The way a person prays flows out of the way he views himself in relation to the Lord.

Prideful people prefer to see themselves in a positive light. Matthew nine provides a fitting example. Jesus was sitting in the home of Matthew the tax collector, surrounded by those considered to be “low-lives.” As is so often the case today, it is the down-and-outers, the troubled, those given over to outward sin who see their need for His help. The religious leaders standing outside did not feel that same sense of urgency. Like the Pharisee praying in the temple, they were fully confident of their spiritual condition. Nevertheless, Jesus came outside and made one of the most poignant statements found in Scripture: “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick...I did not come to call the [self] righteous, but sinners.” This statement describes one of the most important characteristics of those who truly walk in victory: their spiritual need keeps them in close proximity to the One who can meet that need.

Some Christians believe that salvation ends the desperate need for God’s involvement in their lives. Now, they can move forward in their journey toward heaven. In reality, maturing believers grow in awareness of the need for God’s constant involvement.



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Instead of leaving the Lord back at the starting gate, they see Him at the finish line. Realizing the necessity for His help, guidance, correction, and discipline to live victoriously keeps them constantly turning to the Lord.

By contrast, the shallow believer who is not willing to pay the price of pursuing God prefers to invent a godliness of his own imagination. He might try to impress others with what a seeker he is, but the reality of his life with God is that he is quite content to settle for the fake. He is not spiritually healthy; he refuses to acknowledge his sick condition because he is not willing to follow the prescribed treatment needed to correct it. It is much easier to contrive an exaggerated sense of spiritual well-being than to fight for the real thing.

Jesus spoke of a group of people who suffered from this same kind of self-deception. They too imagined that they were walking with God. Judgment Day's reality exposed something different. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven," Jesus said. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Notice that these people were doing all the right things outwardly: identifying themselves with the name of the Lord, prophesying, casting out demons, and even performing miracles. It shows that a person can have wonderful works, even to the point of somehow tapping into the power of God, and yet still be in terrible trouble. Unlike the evangelist who came into our live-in program, these people did not face reality until it was too late.

The fact of the matter is that until a man comes to grip with his desperate condition before God, he will never be broken, never have a real repentance, and never enjoy the abundance made available to the child of God. Instead, he can fully expect his lot to be one of defeat, emptiness, and a false sense of victory that is based on nothing but hype.



## MEDITATION FOR TODAY

“You’ve got to deceive yourself before you can be deceived.”

Anonymous

“A wise man will be master of his mind, a fool will be its slave.”

Publius Syrus

“God is not concerned about our happiness but about our holiness.”<sup>1</sup>

Leonard Ravenhill

“You must be brought to the conviction that your life is a guilty and shameful life... It must become a matter of earnest resolve with you that your life is to undergo a complete transformation.”<sup>2</sup>

Andrew Murray