

Living in *Victory* *Through the Power of Mercy*

Steve Gallagher

Living in Victory

Through the Power of Mercy



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Living in Victory:
Through the Power of Mercy

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Introduction

Living in Victory

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

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if he is still selfish, angry and prideful? Does he really know about victorious living if he does 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

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depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40) 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 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.

A grayscale photograph of a person in a white, textured robe pouring water from a large, ornate, circular vessel into a shallow basin. The person's face is partially visible, looking down at the basin. The water is captured mid-pour, creating a splash in the basin. The background is a plain, light color.

Part One

Seeing Your Need

Meditation For Today

“Jesus Christ cannot begin to do anything for a man until he knows his need... The entrance into the Kingdom of God is always through the moral frontier of need.”¹

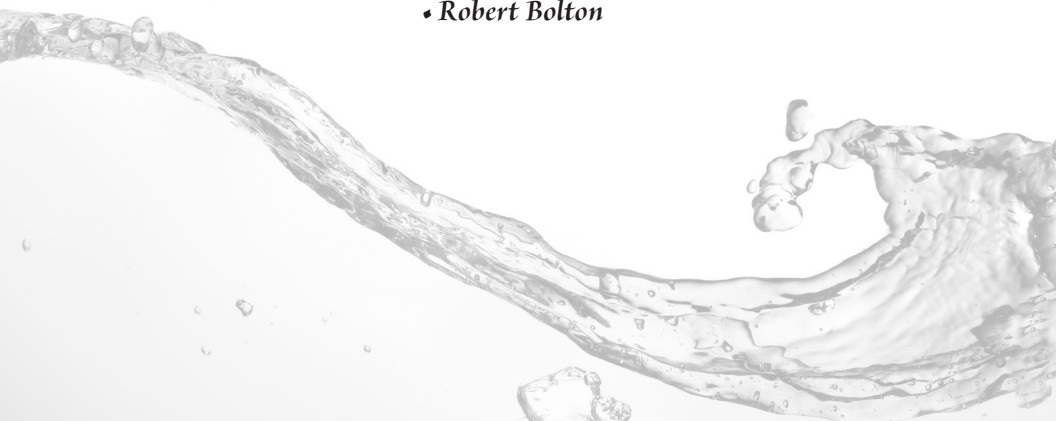
• *Oswald Chambers*

“And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”²

• *The Apostle Paul*

“A man must feel himself in misery, before he will find a remedy; be sick before he will seek a physician; be in prison before he will seek a pardon. A sinner must be weary of his former wicked ways before he will have recourse to Jesus Christ for refreshing. He must be sensible of his spiritual poverty, beggary, and slavery under the devil, before he thirst kindly for heavenly righteousness, and willingly take up Christ’s sweet and easy yoke. He must be cast down, confounded, condemned, a cast away, and lost in himself, before he will look about for a Savior.”³

• *Robert Bolton*



Seeing Your Need

One of my life's greatest blessings is the privilege of working with men who struggle with sexual sin. Over the past 30-plus years, I have directly or indirectly been involved in the lives of countless men with such problems. I have often pleaded with them, taught them, confronted them, encouraged them, and preached to them in response to their great need to find the Lord. On numerous occasions, I have grieved over their losses, reasoned with them for hours, and agonized in prayer over them. I have tearfully begged them to repent and at times have sternly rebuked those who hesitated or refused to do so. Fortunately, for most of them the negative consequences of their sin opened their eyes and exposed their great need for God to work in their lives.

Whether or not you struggle with sexual sin, you also have a need for God to be greater than He presently is in your life. I say this confidently because it is the need of every human being alive today, whether they are deeply spiritual or completely godless. We all have deep emotional and spiritual needs that can only be met by God and through Him alone. The wonderful news is that God has a universe full of mercy for all of us—mercy to meet our needs, to set us free, and to heal our infirmities, allowing each of us to enter into a life of blessedness. The allocation of

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this need-fulfilling mercy comes once we begin to see our need for it. The only hindrance to receiving such unmerited favor from Him hinges upon how much we choose to appropriate for ourselves.

This is what I love about working with sexual addicts. Most of them come to Pure Life Ministries (the ministry I founded in 1986) because they are in trouble and are desperate for help. Being acutely aware of the absolute necessity of God doing a work inside their hearts—and actually acknowledging it—places them into what is an enviable position in the kingdom of God: a man who sees his need.

This is such a tremendous place before the Lord that I often tell these men to thank God for their addiction. If this sounds outrageous to you, consider the following: If Bartimaeus were not blind, would he have been bellowing unashamedly, “Son of David, have mercy on me”? (Mark 10:47) If the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter had not been vexed with a devil, would she have been willing to “eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table”? (Matthew 15:27 KJV) Had King David not been sharply rebuked by Nathan and been forced to see his great crime, would he ever have penned the words, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions”? (Psalm 51:1 KJV) Had Peter not seen how unlike the Lord he was, would he have cried out, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”? (Luke 5:8) And finally, if the publican had not seen his great need, would he have “smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner”? (Luke 18:13 KJV)*

* I do not mean to glorify or justify something as hideous and devilish as a person’s obsession with sexual perversion. When you feel the chains of darkness wrapped around your neck, you are only looking for one thing: freedom! My point is that the alternative to never having something that compels you to seek God is to be content living with little of His presence in your life. Being freed or healed is wonderful, but the affliction is there to teach us to turn to Him. Having tasted His precious Spirit through the whole ordeal, the person should be like the one leper out of ten who came back and worshiped Him.

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The afflictions and struggles of life are what produce a cry for God's help. Individuals who enjoy a comfortable, smooth ride through life really do not know what it is like to be pressed into a tight place with nowhere or no one to turn to but God. It is only human nature for one to "let down" or relax when life becomes more favorable or when certain problems are resolved.

Many men who spend years indulging their sexual appetites, only to find themselves in the frightening grip of the devil, know what it means to plead for God's mercy. The point of desperation is not some obscure experience with them. It is a very real part of their daily lives. Spiritually bankrupt, they are in such utter despair that their only hope is to find God's way out. Such individuals often have a passion to find the Lord. I know firsthand that freedom from such bondage requires a dogged persistence and genuine zeal to seek after the Lord.

Many who do not know the power of a controlling sin do not seek God with the same degree of fervor. Because their needs are not readily observable, they tend to approach the things of God far more casually. They vaguely understand that God desires to mature and transform them, but they lack an intense craving for any such growth or change. They assume that God will somehow accomplish what is needed in their lives and are content to center their Christian walk on increasing their "head knowledge," naming and claiming this and that, and having occasional spiritual experiences.

Men who really understand their great need for God's work in their lives cannot be satisfied with such a lackadaisical approach. They are in trouble spiritually and have no choice but to find the answer in God—no matter what the cost.

The Need That Drove Me To Desperation

From the time I was a little boy, I suffered with a tenacious dual character. In one respect, I possessed a nature so intense that I constantly lived on the fringes of excitability and even anger. My sharp personality intimidated some people and kept others at a distance. Resentment, pride, or selfishness sometimes sparked this harshness. Just as often, however, no premeditated malice was involved; the harshness simply came automatically. No matter how hard I tried to be different, my words always seemed to contain a certain undertone of sarcasm or hostility. I was extremely difficult to get along with. My unbearable nature usually invoked fear or outright anger in most people.

For all my brashness and “tough guy” façade, another side of my character was just as real. Inside I was deeply sensitive. I remember, as a child, feeling terribly vulnerable and fearful of the cutting remarks of my classmates, the abrasive comments of my father, and the foolish jokes of my friends. Outwardly, I had a tough exterior, but inwardly I wore a thin suit of skin. Of course, my touchy nature made me very defensive and overly protective.

To make matters worse, I grew up deeply insecure, living in a home characterized by strife. Oddly enough, my personality was actually a perfect combination of those of my parents. My father was sharp-tongued and sarcastic. My mother was sensitive and insecure. Their incompatible union made for a miserable marriage, an unhappy home, and an unhealthy environment in which to raise a child. Like many other baby-boomers, being raised in an unloving home left me with a giant void. As a result, I constantly sought the acceptance of others in order to somehow fill this empty spot.

Combined, these factors opened a doorway to the dark, dismal world of sexual addiction which dominated my life for

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many years. From my earliest days, I seemed to have had an inordinate attraction to sex in general, and to women in particular. No longer content with girlie magazines or teenage conquests, my compulsive nature compelled me deeper and deeper into the world of perversion. What began as a perceived need for acceptance, which I thought could only be met in the throes of passion, gradually became an insatiable monster demanding increasingly more frequent and baser activity.

Although I could still function (albeit awkwardly) in social and work situations, my thinking became more and more bizarre. My deep-seated fear of people advanced until I was constantly plagued with paranoid thoughts. On one occasion, I was walking in a store when a young teenaged girl laughingly shoved her friend into me. Full of fear and embarrassment, I just knew they thought I was weird (and I was!). Immediately, I made a mad dash for home and sequestered myself in my mother's house for nearly a month.

Unfortunately, it was in this frame of mind and spirit that I lived most of my twenties. By the time I was 24, I had been through dozens of girlfriends and a wife. It was then that I met and married my wife, Kathy. Two anguish-filled years later, she ran off with another man and filed for divorce. At this point, I was finally ready to humble myself and admit my need for the Lord.

Becoming a Christian (and miraculously getting my wife back) dealt a real blow to the demons that had, up until this point, enjoyed great liberty tormenting and controlling me. It gave me a new purpose in life, an enthusiasm for something good and honorable. Becoming a believer did not instantly change my character. I was still Steve Gallagher. I still had a sharp tongue. I was still impatient. I still had thin skin. I was still socially awkward. And I was still very much bound up in sexual addiction.

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Over the next three years I battled with the overwhelming temptations of lust. For most of my life, I purposely went after thrilling experiences to escape the pain of life and in a futile attempt set out to gain a sense of self-worth as a man. Now, that worth was to be found in God alone. Becoming strong enough spiritually to put sexual sin down once and for all took a long time. Even though I battled with sexual temptation quite often, by God's grace I eventually found the freedom I needed.

Six months after my last encounter with another woman, God led me to enter Bible school. Six months later, He directed me to begin a ministry to help other men struggling with sexual sin. It began as a simple support group meeting in Sacramento once a week while I attended Bible school. The group's novelty caused word of it to spread. Before I knew it, I was appearing on national radio and television shows and preaching in various churches.

In 1989, Kathy and I bought a small farm in Kentucky and relocated the ministry there. At this time, we felt led by God to open it up as a residential facility for men who needed more intensive help breaking free from the control of sexual addiction.

By the time men arrived at this new program in January 1990, I had been a Christian more than seven years. I soon discovered how little I acted like the One I claimed to represent and serve. It's one thing to appear on short media interviews or preach at churches where the people do not know you. Living with others in an environment where your uncrucified *self* can show its hideous face is completely different.

Regrettably, those men who came to me for help in those early years were probably sorely disappointed. Fortunately, people appreciated and respected my undeniable sincerity and intense zeal for God. It is also true that the Lord gave me clear insight concerning how to gain freedom from habitual sexual sin. However, I was still very full of myself. I was

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abrasive, prideful, and self-centered, and I was well aware of it. Romans 7 best describes the constant helplessness and agony I experienced at seeing how unlike Christ I was. What particularly aggravated me was counseling men who were by nature warm, smooth, and friendly with others. They seemed so much more like Jesus than I was, despite the fact that I diligently sought after Him several hours each day. In contrast, however, their outward appearance of goodness was not matched by an enthusiasm about the things of God.

My constant failures, glaringly apparent to everybody around me, kept me crying out to God. Certainly, I was a different man. My tongue was more controlled than ever, but I was in a position where I could not afford to make mistakes. Each time I responded defensively or sarcastically, it exposed the selfish, prideful, and unloving nature still very much alive in me. Only Kathy knows my anguish over my constant failures during those early years of ministry.

To make matters even worse, I entered a time when my fellowship with God seemed to be drying up. Times of prayer had been the one place where I could get a temporary reprieve from my failures and feel as though I was accomplishing something for the Lord. They were a source of life and refreshment to me. But now when I prayed it seemed as though the heavens were brass. The Bible became stale and boring. My walk with God seemed lifeless.

I saw other Christians who seemed so happy, but I knew that for most of them it was simply a superficial happiness that was part of their character and always had been. And yet, though I felt I was doing everything right, I had no real joy or inner peace. Where was the bubbling fountain of life? Where was the abundant life promised to all believers in Christ? Where was my all-consuming love for God and others? Where was the joy of the Lord?

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Just as I was about to lose all hope, God came into my dark, miserable world and started to open my eyes in a totally unexpected way. In November 1991, I visited a small, Pentecostal church where nobody knew me. The pastor preached hard from Luke 6 about what it means to be a Christian. “Love your enemies...Be merciful...Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say...?” The Lord hammered these words into my heart. I was bewildered about how I could be trying so hard to do right and yet be so far from God. When the pastor gave the altar call, I reluctantly trudged up the aisle—not because I felt compelled—but simply as one more emotionless, dry act of obedience. Convinced that I lacked the kind of love for God and others this man of God expressed in his sermon, I was willing to humble myself and ask for it.

At the altar, all the months (even years) of pent-up frustration came gushing out. My pride and selfishness became vividly real to me. I was broken over my lack of love for God and others. I drenched the altar with tears. In that brokenness came a fresh, new perspective I hadn’t felt since my first-love days of 1982. Instantly, my intimacy with God was restored and a new compassion for the men in the Residential Program bubbled up from within.

This giant leap forward for me was only the beginning. I needed more, much more. I had to learn how to live in this newfound life. I felt like a tiny baby crawling around the crib. I quickly realized that many of my perceptions about God and man were wrong, but what now? How could I correct my distorted ideas?

Shortly after this, in another one of those God-ordained events, I found out about a very special ministry located a couple hundred miles north of us. The Zion Faith Homes is a place where those in Christian service can go to find the Lord in a powerful way. A fellow minister told me, “The reason His

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voice can be heard more clearly there is primarily because of the deep level of consecration the ministers live in who run the place. If you are wanting to learn about living, real Christianity, that's the place to go!" I asked one of my missionary friends if he had ever heard of the Faith Homes, and he told me in a hushed tone that it was a "powerhouse" where one could sense the Spirit of God in a dramatic way. Another pastor said that as soon as he walked through the front door he felt the Holy Ghost searching his heart, exposing sin, selfishness, pride, or questionable motives of his heart.

It sounded like the very thing I needed. Kathy and I didn't know what to expect the first time we visited. Would the people be super-spiritual weirdos, out of touch with the realities of life? Or would they be in such close contact with God that they could read our thoughts? When we arrived at the Faith Homes that summer day of 1992, these and other questions filled our minds.

We were greatly relieved to find the people there—ministers, workers and trainees—to be the nicest, most normal folks we could have imagined. We did not get the sense that they were strange or cultic at all. In fact, as the days rolled by, we began to see their humility and unselfishness in a thousand different little ways. Despite my recent experience of brokenness, my selfishness and pride stood out in stark contrast to the way they demonstrated the love of Christ to other people.

We left a week later convinced that their relationship with the Lord was what we longed for. There was an abundance of life in their Christian experience that I had never seen before. I realized that I had witnessed the sort of Christianity Paul described throughout his writings. I was determined to have what they possessed.

Kathy and I began making two-, three-, and even four-week visits. When we visited, we took the role of trainees scrubbing dishes, floors and toilets and waiting on other guests. For the

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first time in our Christian lives, we learned what it really means to serve others.

God used my experience at the Faith Homes to humble me. As I diminished in my own estimation, a funny thing happened simultaneously: God became bigger! As I saw how unloving I was, I saw how full of love He is. As I saw how high-minded I was, I saw how humble He is. As I saw how selfish I was, I saw how unselfish He is. As I lost sight of my own supposed "goodness," I saw how good He is. Somehow, through it all, a true knowledge of God formed in my heart, changing the way I treated God and others.

Since that time, God has crushed me, humbled me, and disciplined me many times. Through it all, I have discovered who He is and what He is like. Perhaps even more importantly, He has reshaped my thinking and given me the heart transformation I so desperately needed. Although there are still faint traces occasionally observed by those close to me, for the most part, that sharp tongue, biting sarcasm, and hostile attitude have been swallowed up in a love which only my dear Lord could provide. God has surely met my deepest needs. I have discovered that His greatest work in my life has been at points of brokenness and helplessness when I realized my need for more of Him.

You might consider the way I have constantly turned to God for help as a picture of defeat, not victory. However, it is my testimony that what God has done in my life will stand the test of time because it has been built upon the solid foundation of the Rock, not the shifting sands of human effort or emotion.