

BACK TO THE BIBLE PRESENTS



WINNING THE WAR FOR OUR SOULS

HOW SCRIPTURE ABSORPTION
COMBATS THE WORLD, THE FLESH,
AND THE DEVIL

DR. ARNIE COLE

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DR. ARNIE COLE

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Bill Bantz, who teaches me the strength of unwavering focus in the face of life's battles. My friend reminds me of the deeper struggle beyond flesh and blood—the one against the powers, principalities, and rulers of darkness as written in Ephesians 6:12. May this book honor his growing legacy and inspire many others to stand firm in Jesus.

—ARNIE

INTRODUCTION

It seems like yesterday that I was attending a Vietnam War protest with a Buffalo Springfield song blaring over the loudspeakers. I can still hear it in my mind:

*Stop. Hey what's that sound
Everybody look what's going down
There's a man with a gun over there
Telling me I got to beware
Young people speaking their minds...(For What It's Worth).*

It was a confusing time. We were legally adults, but had very little control over anything. Our frustration came out as “HELL NO WE WON’T GO!” and protests. I had Black Panther friends who blocked students from attending class by chaining shut all of the entry doors to the main lecture halls. In that protest, the auditorium was lit on fire and a nearby Bank of America building burned down.

Of course all the news stations showed up. And wouldn’t you know it, all the reporters picked out the loser in the group who was stoned out of his mind on acid as our protest’s spokesperson.

Instead of those in control finding better ways to communicate, the response was yelled back, “AMERICA, LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT!”

But we didn’t leave it. Instead we started a free love movement that then rocked the church to its very core.

INTRODUCTION

Today, my grandchildren are growing up in an environment where a quarter of them don't even know if good and evil exist. The suicide rate among teenagers has become commonplace, and we adults are no better at figuring out how to communicate. We can't even agree on how to define "man," "woman" or which restroom they should use.

So yes, from the 1960s on, in some ways our nation is more divided today than it was during the Civil War. We have political polarization, cultural clashes, and competing visions for America's future. But beneath these political and cultural tensions, something deeper is at work—something spiritual. We are living in the midst of a war for our souls. It's crucial to recognize that the most consequential battle is not fought in Congress or in the media. It is fought in the spiritual arena.

And somehow we as Christ Followers are supposed to resist all this darkness and engage the Light.

For Christ Followers in America today, every day feels like a battle. We are bombarded by competing worldviews, surrounded by the temptations of a secular society, and pushed to the cultural margins by those who reject the Christian way. Every day feels like a battle because every day is a battle. This is not a new phenomenon. For two thousand years, wise followers

of Jesus have described the spiritual struggle of the Christian life in military terms. The Apostle Paul famously encouraged believers to “put on the full armor of God” (Eph 6:10-20). He urged Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12). Early Christians understood that the Christian life was a battle, not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces (Eph 6:11-12).

One of the clearest descriptions of this battle comes from the early Christian understanding of the “three enemies of the soul”: the world, the flesh, and the devil. These three enemies, together, wage war against us daily. Yet, this ancient wisdom has largely been forgotten or ignored in modern Christianity. We downplay the existence of the devil, indulge the flesh, and find ourselves enamored with the world. But these enemies are very real, and their influence is wreaking havoc on our souls, individually, and on society at large.

The world, the flesh, and the devil are not passive enemies. They are active, relentless, and strategic in their efforts to destroy us. As Christians, we are called to resist them, but to do so effectively, we must first unmask these enemies and understand how they operate. Only then can we develop a strategy to defeat them.

In his book *Live No Lies*, John Mark Comer provides a helpful framework for understanding the battle we face. He writes:

“Our war against the three enemies of the soul is not a war of guns and bombs. It’s not against other people at all. It’s a war on lies. And the problem is less that we tell lies and more that we live them; we let false narratives about reality into our bodies, and they wreak havoc in our souls.” [1]

Comer’s point is crucial: deception is the Enemy’s primary weapon against us. The devil, the flesh, and the world all operate through lies—false narratives that distort reality and lead us away from the truth of God. Our task, then, is to recognize these lies, reject them, and replace them with the truth found in Scripture.

But let me be clear: this will not be an easy task. If we take the way of Jesus seriously, we will face resistance, not only from these spiritual enemies but also from the world around us. Faithful followers of Jesus are now a minority in America. Our place in society is not one of honor but increasingly one of shame and marginalization. We are often treated with hostility rather than tolerance. But we must remain steadfast.

[1] John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies That Sabotage Your Peace* (Waterbrook, 2021), xxii.

INTRODUCTION

As Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” (John 15:18). This war is one we cannot afford to lose.

In this book, we will take a closer look at each of the three enemies—the devil, the flesh, and the world—and consider how they work to undermine our faith. We will then explore the strategy God has given us to fight back: the spiritual reading of Scripture. This ancient practice, known as *lectio divina*, is not just about reading the Bible for information; it’s about allowing God’s Word to shape and transform us from the inside out. By engaging deeply with Scripture, we can equip ourselves for the spiritual battle we face and emerge victorious.

WINNING THE WAR FOR OUR SOULS

CHAPTER 1: THE DEVIL— THE FATHER OF LIES

DR. ARNIE COLE

In our modern, secularized world, many people—including many Christians—dismiss the existence of the devil as a premodern superstition. We view him as a mythical figure, a caricature with horns and a pitchfork, rather than a real, spiritual being. But Scripture is clear: the devil is real, and he is actively working to destroy us.

One of the most direct teachings about the devil comes from Jesus himself. In John 8:31-47, Jesus tells the Pharisees that if they embrace his teachings, they will know the truth and the truth will set them free. The Pharisees responded by claiming that they were already free because they were descendants of Abraham. But Jesus rebukes them, saying that they are and that their true father is not God but the devil. Jesus says:

“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Let's unpack what Jesus is saying here. First, he affirms the reality of the devil. The Bible gives the devil various names: Satan, the serpent, the tempter, the accuser, and the evil one. Jesus himself calls the devil “the prince of this world” (John 12:31), highlighting his influence over worldly affairs. The devil is not just a

passive observer but an active agent of chaos and destruction. His goal is simple: to destroy what God loves. Jesus describes him as a murderer and a liar—two attributes that define his character and his strategy.

The devil's primary weapon is deception. He is the "father of lies," and his lies are not always overt. Often, they are subtle distortions of the truth. The devil knows that the most effective lies are those that contain a grain of truth but are twisted to lead us away from God. These lies infiltrate our minds and shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and God. The devil's lies are insidious because they don't just affect our thoughts; they influence our actions and, ultimately, our souls.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis offers a brilliant portrayal of how the devil works. The book is written as a series of letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, Wormwood, a junior tempter. In one letter, Screwtape advises Wormwood on how to keep his "patient" (a human) from recognizing the devil's influence: "*It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality, our best work is done by keeping things out.*" Lewis' insight is profound. The devil's lies are not just about what he puts into our minds but about what he keeps out—truth, goodness, and beauty. When we believe the devil's lies, we live them out, and they wreak havoc on our souls. [2]

[2] C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (HarperOne, 2001).

For me the first great lie Satan had convinced me of was that Jesus was my good luck charm. If I simply believed in Him, all things would work out for good. When my life started to fall apart in my late teens, and Jesus didn't stop the consequences, I thought this Christianity thing simply did not work. That is the biggest of all my wrong decisions in life.

My first Psychology term paper presented the paradigm shift that the Bible was the book of no and at best the concept of sin limited us from total and complete freedom. In fact I lived that lie until I was confronted with a major storm at sea where I realized no matter what I thought I had absolutely no power to get through the 100 foot waves to save myself. I was 47.

That's a glimpse at how the devil's lies made their way to me personally. I'm sure you have your own example. For the broader view, look at how his lies have wreaked havoc on our society by embracing lie upon lie about sex since the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s. We have rejected God's design for sex—within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman—and instead embraced ideas like “free love,” abortion, no-fault divorce, and the normalization of LGBTQ+ relationships. Now transgenderism is normal with plans to normalize being attracted sexually to children (that's my guess within the next 10 years).

We are surrounded by lies that have become so pervasive that they are now accepted as normal, even virtuous. But the Bible is clear: when we depart from God's design, we are choosing the devil's toxic, life- and joy-robbing path of destruction. Put differently, when we go against the grain of the universe, we get splinters. The decline in happiness levels in the U.S. since the 1960s is not a coincidence.

If we want to win the war for our souls, we must reject the devil's lies and embrace the truth of God's Word. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32), and that truth is found in Scripture. The devil's lies enslave us, but God's truth liberates us.

WINNING THE WAR FOR OUR SOULS

CHAPTER 2:
THE FLESH—
OUR
DISORDERED
DESIRES

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While the devil works externally through deception and temptation, the flesh works internally. The “flesh” refers to our fallen, sinful nature—the part of us that is inclined toward self-gratification and rebellion against God. The flesh is not merely the physical body but rather the disordered desires that arise from our sinful nature. As Paul writes in Galatians 5:17, *“For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.”*

The flesh is a formidable enemy because it is always with us. We are constantly battling our own sinful inclinations. John Mark Comer describes the flesh as “the base instincts of humanity—our animalistic cravings for pleasure, comfort, and self-gratification.” These cravings are not inherently wrong; God created us with desires for things like food, sex, and rest. But when these desires become disordered, when they become the primary drivers of our actions, they lead us away from God.

Take the example of sex. Sex, within the context of marriage, is a good gift from God. It is a means of deepening intimacy between a husband and wife, and it reflects the covenant love of God. But when the desire for sex becomes disordered—when it is sought outside of marriage, when it is pursued for purely selfish reasons, or when it becomes an idol—it leads to destruction. The Bible calls this *“living according to the*

flesh” (Rom. 8:13). The flesh leads us to gratify our immediate desires at the expense of our long-term spiritual well-being. In other words, the flesh promises pleasure but delivers bondage.

Today’s culture encourages the indulgence of the flesh. We are told to “follow our hearts” and to seek happiness by satisfying every desire. The world celebrates self-gratification, whether it’s in the realm of sex, materialism, personal ambition, or otherwise.

I took this philosophy hook line and sinker. In fact, I’ll never forget at age 30 having a Ferrari and Rolls in the garage plus a new 5,400 square foot, modern two-story home with a balcony overlooking the Mexican-style courtyard. And laughing at myself as I’m thinking about hanging myself off the balcony. Not long after that, I bought what some would consider a sailing yacht and named it *Uno Mas* (“One More”). With that bold statement proudly emblazoned on the stern, my life was always about room for one more something—anything to stratify my unsatiable cravings.

I learned for a fact Comer’s points about living lies and letting the world’s false narratives wreak havoc on our souls. “The flesh is insatiable.” The more we feed it, the hungrier it becomes. What begins as a pursuit of happiness quickly becomes an addiction to pleasure. Instead of finding freedom, we find ourselves enslaved to our own cravings.

The Apostle Paul understood this struggle well. In Romans 7:18-19, he writes: *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”* Paul’s words resonate with anyone who has struggled with the flesh. We know what is right, yet we find ourselves drawn to what is wrong. The flesh is powerful, and overcoming it requires more than willpower; it requires God’s grace and the Holy Spirit’s transformative power.

Victory over the flesh comes through what the Bible calls putting to death *“the deeds of the body”* (Rom. 8:13). This doesn’t mean we reject our physical bodies or our God-given desires, but that we reject the disordered desires of the flesh. It means practicing self-discipline and cultivating habits that align our lives with God’s will. This is where spiritual disciplines like Scripture intake, prayer, and meaningful church involvement come into play. These disciplines help us reorient our desires and strengthen our resistance to the flesh.

One of the most profound truths of the Christian faith is that we are not left to fight this battle alone. The Holy Spirit dwells within us, empowering us to overcome the flesh. As Paul writes in Galatians 5:16, *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify*

the desires of the flesh.” The more we yield to the Spirit, the less power the flesh has over us. What’s more, as we will discuss later, God has given us the church as a support community of fellow fighters.

Significantly, this battle is not a one-time event but a daily struggle. As long as we live in this fallen world, we will wrestle with the flesh. However, by God’s grace and through the power of the Spirit, we can experience increasing victory over our sinful desires, one day at a time. The flesh may be strong, but God is stronger, and if we rely on him one day at a time, we will gain victory.

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CHAPTER 3:
THE WORLD—
A SYSTEM
OPPOSED TO
GOD

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The third enemy in our spiritual battle is “the world.” When the Bible speaks of “the world” as an enemy, it does not refer to the physical world or humanity in general. Instead, it refers to the system of values, beliefs, and behaviors that are opposed to God and His kingdom. The world is the cultural environment that normalizes sin and shapes our minds and hearts in ways that are contrary to God’s truth.

The Apostle John warns us about the dangers of loving the world: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”* (1 John 2:15-16).

John identifies three critical aspects of the world’s influence: the lust of the flesh (our cravings for physical pleasure), the lust of the eyes (our desire for material possessions), and the pride of life (our pursuit of status and recognition). These are the values the world elevates, and they are antithetical to the values of God’s kingdom. The world tells us that we should prioritize our own happiness, seek wealth and success, and indulge our desires. But Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matt. 16:24).

One of the greatest challenges for Christians today is

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the subtle nature of the world's influence. As our society has secularized, its cultural institutions—business, education, entertainment, politics, and more—are increasingly organized in ways that subvert God's design for human life. Sin is normalized, with the effect that what is wrong seems right and what is right seems strange. The world desensitizes us to sin by presenting it as harmless, desirable, or even virtuous.

Consider, for example, the way our culture views materialism. The relentless pursuit of wealth and possessions is not only accepted in our society but celebrated. Advertisements, social media, and even our conversations are saturated with the idea that more is better and that happiness is found in acquiring more things. But Jesus warns us, *"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"* (Mark 8:36). The world tells us that success is measured by what we have, but Jesus teaches that true success is found in knowing and following God.

The world's influence also extends to the way we think about personal freedom. In today's culture, personal independence is often seen as the highest good. We are told to live our own truth, to do whatever makes us happy, and to reject any form of authority that limits our freedom. Our secular culture lies to us in a thousand ways by encouraging us to pursue sex, money, power, and other things in ways that oppose

our spiritual integrity.” [3] But this worldview is in direct opposition to the Christian understanding of freedom. True freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want but the ability to do what is right. It is the freedom to live according to God’s will and experience the joy that comes from a life of obedience.

We must reject the temptation to elevate temporal, material concerns above eternal, spiritual realities. The world tells us to prioritize the here and now, to seek immediate gratification, and to pursue personal happiness at all costs. But the Bible calls us to live with an eternal perspective: *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”* (Col. 3:2).

To overcome the influence of the world, we must cultivate a countercultural mindset. This begins with immersing ourselves in Scripture and allowing God’s Word to shape our thoughts, desires, and actions. We must also surround ourselves with a community of believers who can encourage us and hold us accountable in our pursuit of holiness. As Paul writes in Romans 12:2, *“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

[3] For an excellent treatment of contemporary idols such as sex, money, and power, see Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Sex, Money, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* (Penguin, 2011).

CHAPTER 3: THE WORLD—A SYSTEM OPPOSED TO GOD

Ultimately, the world's influence can only be defeated by the power of God's truth. Jesus prayed for His disciples, saying, "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth*" (John 17:17). It is through the truth of God's Word that we are sanctified, set apart from the world, and equipped to live as faithful followers of Christ.

WINNING THE WAR FOR OUR SOULS

CHAPTER 4:

THE SPIRITUAL READING OF SCRIPTURE— A PROVEN STRATEGY TO COMBAT THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL

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CHAPTER 4: THE SPIRITUAL READING OF SCRIPTURE—
A PROVEN STRATEGY TO COMBAT THE WORLD, THE
FLESH, AND THE DEVIL

Given the formidable enemies we face—the devil, the flesh, and the world—how can we possibly stand firm and emerge victorious in this spiritual battle?

Thankfully, God has provided us with a powerful weapon: His Word. The spiritual reading of Scripture, known in the early church as *lectio divina*, is not merely an intellectual exercise but a way of engaging with God’s Word that transforms our hearts and minds. [4]

We must go beyond intellectual comprehension because the Bible is not just a collection of ancient writings; it is the living Word of God, “*sharper than any double-edged sword*” (Heb. 4:12). It is the primary means by which God speaks to us, nourishes our souls, and equips us for the battle we face. By reading Scripture regularly and absorbing its teaching, we fortify ourselves with the truth that counters the lies of the devil, the flesh, and the world.

This is what the early church understood so well—the importance of engaging deeply with Scripture so that it transforms us rather than merely filling our brains with information. They recognized that spiritual strength and transformation take place when we discipline ourselves to read Scripture daily, understanding and receiving the text so that it penetrates the depths of our soul and radiates outward into our actions, words, and attitudes.

[4] For an introduction to *Lectio Divina* for modern readers, see James C. Wilhoit & Evan B. Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life* (IVP, 2012).

CHAPTER 4: THE SPIRITUAL READING OF SCRIPTURE— A PROVEN STRATEGY TO COMBAT THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL

So, how did the early church go about reading Scripture *spiritually*? They put in place a fourfold pattern that optimized their devotional time and guarded against reading Scripture as the mere acquisition of information or the “checking off” of a to-do list. Their names for the four steps were *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*—Latin for reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Let’s take a deeper look at these steps, mining them for insight into how we can win the battle for our souls today.

LECTIO (READING)

For the early church, the first step in a spiritual reading of Scripture is... reading. But by “reading,” they didn’t mean to scan the headlines or race through the text as if it were a social media post or text message on your smartphone. No, they meant to read the text slowly and attentively, allowing the words to sink in. The goal is not to analyze the text, gain the information, and move on but to patiently read and listen to God’s voice. This type of reading is less dependent on one’s intellectual abilities and more reliant on the openness of one’s heart toward God.

MEDITATIO (MEDITATION)

For the early church, the natural progression is to move from reading to meditation, reflecting on the deep

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meaning and implications of the text. They reflected on questions such as, What is God saying to me through this text? What word, phrase, or idea stands out? Early Christians took the time to ponder and let the text resonate in their hearts. They understood that life causes us to meditate on many things—family, friends, work, and more—and that we must make time to meditate on the most significant subject of all: God himself.

ORATIO (PRAYER)

After reading and meditating, the early church understood the importance of responding to God relationally. In essence, prayer is simply communication with God, speaking to him, and listening in return. *“Prayer is the relational space within which our interpretation of Scripture is performed.”* [5] Although early Christians surely prayed before and during their Bible reading, it seems fitting that prayer is positioned as the third step of spiritual reading. Having received the word of the Lord, they would respond with praise, confession, thanksgiving, or petition. They wanted Scripture to shape their prayers as they spoke to God from their hearts.

[5] Wilhoit and Howard, *Discovering Lectio Divina*, 92.

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CONTEMPLATIO (CONTEMPLATION)

The final step is contemplation—resting in God’s presence. After reading, meditating, and praying, early Christians understood the need to simply sit in silence before God, allowing His Word to penetrate their souls. This was a time of surrender, where they let the truths of Scripture transform them from the inside out. In this moment of contemplation, they were not striving to do anything or to achieve any specific outcome. They were simply *being* with God, letting His Word shape and mold them in ways that go beyond intellectual understanding. This is where transformation happens, as God’s truth penetrates the deepest parts of their being and renews their minds.

The practice of *lectio divina*, therefore, was not about gathering more information; it was about a relational encounter with God through His Word. The historical and biographical literature suggests that many Christians engaged in this practice daily, the truths of Scripture moving from their heads to their hearts so it could take root and bear fruit in their lives. This spiritual reading of Scripture was not a quick fix or a formula for success. It was the lifelong, one-day-a-time practice of drawing near to God and allowing His truth to equip them for battle against the devil, the flesh, and the world.

WINNING THE WAR FOR OUR SOULS

CHAPTER 5:
THE SPIRITUAL
READING OF
SCRIPTURE FOR
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DR. ARNIE COLE

In many ways, the situation we find ourselves in today mirrors that of the early church. There are differences, of course. The early church read on parchment, whereas we read books and digital material. The early church often experienced brutal persecution, while most of us have not. Et cetera. But like them, we face the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our *world* is similar to theirs—just as they lived in the pagan Roman Empire, so we live in an increasingly secular America. Our *flesh* is the same as theirs—we are created in the image of God but fallen and tempted toward sinful patterns of thought and action. Finally, we face the same nemesis, the *Devil*, who seeks to kill, steal, and destroy.

What's more, the God we serve has not changed. He still works in and through our lives by means of his word. Therefore, just as the early church fortified itself for the battle through the spiritual reading of Scripture, so must we. That's why Back to the Bible undertook extensive research on the application of *lectio divina* for today's context. Based on the research, we have developed a fourfold framework, similar to the early church's, to help Christians engage with God's Word in a way that fosters spiritual growth and resilience in the face of spiritual battles.

We call it the "Four-Step Daily Spiritual Fitness Program." It differs slightly from *lectio divina* in that it combines the first four steps of the early church's pattern into three while carving out room for a fourth

step that calls the Christian to share what they have learned with others. Through these four steps, we not only fortify ourselves spiritually—resisting the lies of the devil, overcoming the desires of the flesh, and rejecting the influence of the world—but discipline ourselves to share the gospel and disciple others.

RECEIVE

We begin by receiving God’s Word into our hearts and minds. This step mirrors the *lectio* phase of *lectio divina*—a time to read and listen. As we read Scripture, we acknowledge our need for God’s truth and allow it to penetrate our hearts. This is more than just a casual reading of the Bible; it is an intentional act of opening ourselves up to God’s voice. We read Scripture expecting that God will speak to, challenge, and comfort us.

The challenge for contemporary Christians is to “unhurry” ourselves amid our digital age’s many demands and distractions. Thus, it is helpful to find a place and time where we can focus on God’s word in an uninterrupted manner. Having found a time and place, we also want to clear our minds of distractions and prepare to read with a heart of humility and dependence. In doing these things, we position ourselves for a genuine encounter with God.

REFLECT

The second step is to reflect on the passage we have read. This involves engaging deeply with the text and considering its meaning and relevance for our lives. Reflection is about meditating on Scripture, much like the *meditatio* phase of *lectio divina*. We ask questions like: What is God saying to me through this passage? How does this truth apply to my life? In what ways do I need to change or grow in response to this truth? Reflection helps us internalize the Word of God and discern how it can shape our thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

The challenge for contemporary Christians isn't that we need to learn how to meditate. We are pretty adept at meditating on things other than Scripture—sports teams, political issues, Netflix shows, financial goals, and more. The challenge, therefore, is to learn how to meditate on something as profoundly significant as the word of God. We must apprentice ourselves to the task, dwelling on Scripture, turning it over in our minds, returning to it, and thinking it through in every way possible. In doing so, we deepen our encounter with God.

RESPOND

After reflecting on Scripture, we move to the third step: responding. This is the *oratio* phase of *lectio*

divina, where we respond to God in prayer. But in our Spiritual Fitness Program, responding goes beyond prayer—it also involves obedience. As we pray and seek God’s guidance, we commit to living out the truths we have learned. This is where transformation happens, as we allow God’s Word to influence the way we live. It could mean changing a behavior, adopting a new attitude, or stepping out in faith to obey God’s commands. Responding to Scripture is about putting our faith into action.

The challenge for contemporary Christians is that our lives are quite full, too full, it seems, to respond in a way befitting the word of God. We must unclutter our lives enough that we don’t consider prayer a waste of time, that we can remain in prayer for more than two minutes or return to God continually in prayer throughout the day. Similarly, we must make room in our lives for obedience so that adherence to biblical commands takes precedence over our obsession with sports, entertainment, wealth accumulation, or otherwise.

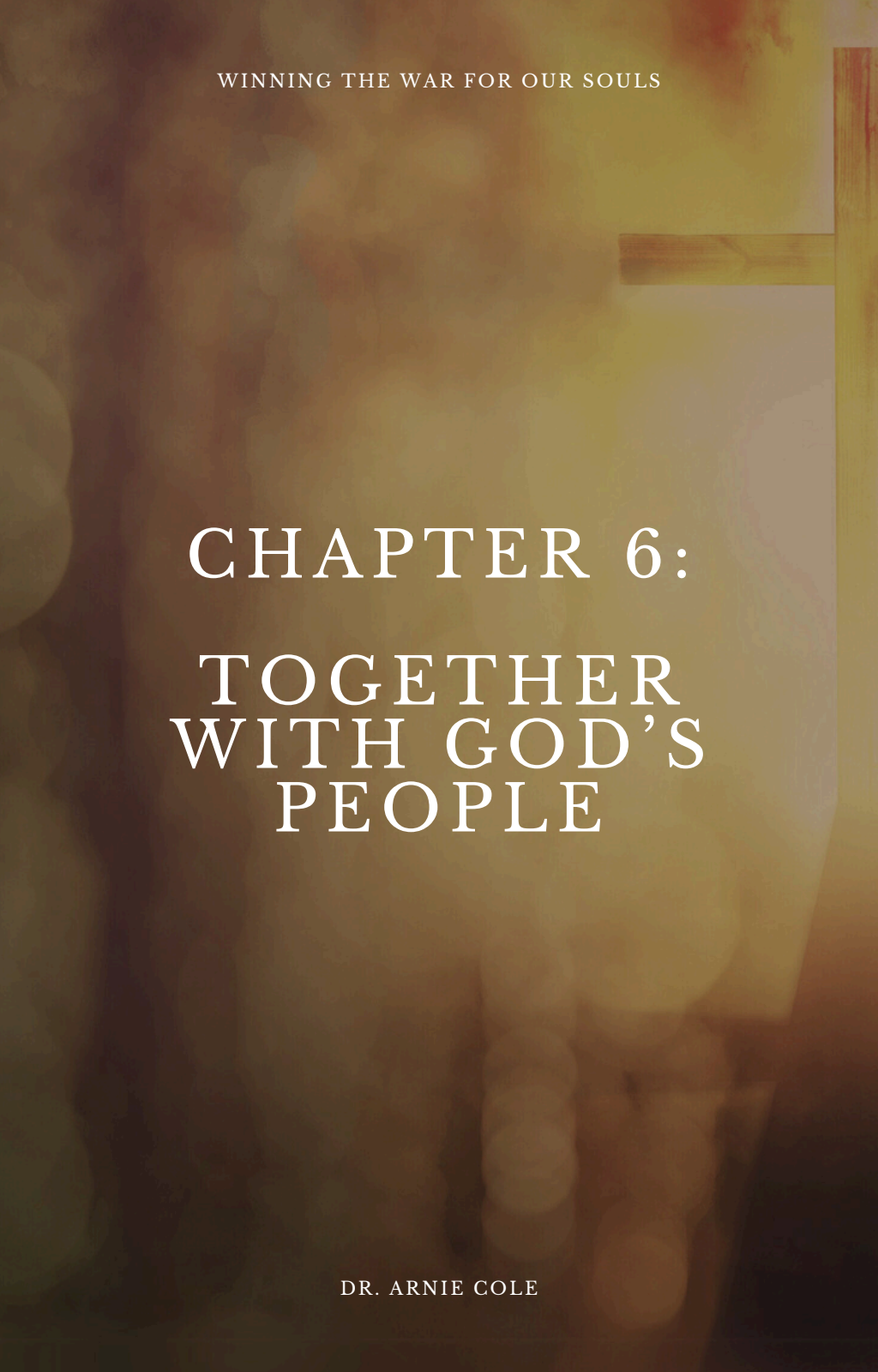
REVEAL

The final step is to reveal the truth we have received to others. This is where the spiritual reading of Scripture becomes not just an inward journey but an outward expression of faith. We are not meant to keep God’s truth to ourselves; we are called to share it with others.

This step involves disciple-making and evangelism as we share what we have learned from Scripture with those around us. Whether through conversations, teaching, mentoring, or simply living out the gospel in our daily interactions, we reveal the truth of God's Word to others. This step echoes the *contemplatio* phase of *lectio divina*, where the truths we have encountered in God's presence overflow into our relationships and communities.

The challenge for contemporary Christians is working up the courage and spiritual sensitivity to share boldly and effectively with the people in our lives. It will take courage to share biblical convictions with people who view biblical Christianity as outdated, implausible, or even bigoted. It will take spiritual sensitivity to pass along biblical truth with people who are hurting, angry at God, suspicious of Christians, or otherwise in a difficult position to receive what we say. The challenges are great, but the God we serve is even greater, and is with us every step of the way (Mt 28:20).

So, these are the four steps we suggest. Reading Scripture this way reminds us that we are sanctified by faith just as we are saved by faith. The four-step spiritual reading of Scripture reminds us that we are ever dependent on God to sanctify us, just as we were entirely reliant on him to save us from our sins in the first place.



WINNING THE WAR FOR OUR SOULS

CHAPTER 6: TOGETHER WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

DR. ARNIE COLE

So, to sum up the argument so far, we Christians in America live in a deeply divided society. Daily, we experience adverse effects of political polarization, cultural clashes, and competing visions for America's future. But beneath these political and cultural tensions is a deeper problem still—a spiritual conflict of epic proportions. We are living in the midst of *a war for our souls*, beset on every side by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

At the bottom, the conflict is rooted in lies, darkly subversive ideas that come from the *devil*, not Jesus, and lead to death and destruction. As we—consciously or unconsciously—adopt his lies, they warp our *flesh*, our patterns of thinking, desiring, and doing. Finally, as a critical mass of people buy into those lies at an ever deeper level, our sinful desires and life patterns become normalized in the social and cultural *world* we inhabit. It's a vicious cycle, one that must be broken.

So, how do we resist the world, the flesh, and the devil? The solution we have suggested centers on the transformative power of engaging daily in a spiritual reading of Scripture. But I would be remiss not to mention the transformative power of reading Scripture within the context of Christian community, especially God's chosen community, the church. One of the most basic biblical teachings is the church is vital to proper fellowship with God (Acts 2:40-47). If we engage in the spiritual reading of Scripture but aren't meaningfully

involved in a local church, our spiritual health will still lag behind.

We can't, and shouldn't try to, follow Jesus alone. If we obey God's command to absorb Scripture while disobeying his commands to gather for corporate worship and fellowship with other Christians, we weaken ourselves inestimably for the battle. John Mark Comer puts it well:

The call to follow Jesus was—and still is—a call to join his community of the Way. And by following Jesus together, not alone, we are able to (1) discern Jesus' truth from the devil's lies, (2) help one another override our flesh by the Spirit, and (3) form a robust community of deep relationships that functions as a counterculture to the world. In doing so, we're able to resist the gravitational pull of all three enemies of the soul.[6]

Think about it. Why would you go to war alone? Especially when combatting the most powerful creature on the planet, along with the dark forces under his command? So, don't be hoodwinked into thinking you can go it alone on the spiritual level, either. [7]

[6] John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*, 229.

[7] For a brief treatment of the importance of the church in a post-Christian context, see Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Crossway, 2008); and Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* (Crossway, 2012).

CONCLUSION

VICTORY THROUGH THE WORD

In this war for our souls, we are not left defenseless. The world, the flesh, and the devil may be formidable enemies, but God has given us the ultimate weapon: His Word. The spiritual reading of Scripture is not just a tool for personal growth; it is a divine strategy for resisting the lies of the devil, taming the desires of the flesh, and rejecting the influence of a world that stands opposed to God. By engaging deeply with Scripture through reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation, we allow God's truth to permeate every aspect of our lives. This daily discipline strengthens us for the battle we face, equipping us to live faithfully in a world that is increasingly hostile to the way of Jesus.

But victory doesn't come through our efforts alone. It is a victory won through the power of God's Word and by relying on His Spirit. As we immerse ourselves in Scripture, we are reminded of the promises of God, encouraged by His faithfulness, and strengthened by His presence. And as we read, reflect, respond, and reveal His truth to others, we not only secure our own souls but also help others in the fight. We are not fighting this battle in isolation but as part of the body of Christ, the church. Together, we can stand firm against the onslaught of the world, the flesh, and the devil, knowing that ultimate victory belongs to Christ.

So, let us take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17), and engage in the spiritual reading of Scripture with renewed commitment.

CONCLUSION: VICTORY THROUGH THE WORD

The battle is real, but so is the victory we have in Christ. Through His Word, we are equipped to win the war for our souls and live as faithful followers of Jesus in a world desperately needing His truth. Victory is assured—not because of our strength but His.



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