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THE
BONDAGE
BREAKER
YOUTH EDITION

NEIL T. ANDERSON & DAVE PARK

Founder of Freedom in Christ Ministries

THE
BONDAGE
BREAKER®
YOUTH EDITION

NEIL T. ANDERSON & DAVE PARK



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
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This book contains stories in which people’s names and some details of their situations have been changed.

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FINDING TRUTH AND FREEDOM

When Neil first wrote *The Bondage Breaker*, he never imagined that over two million copies would be sold worldwide. The body of Christ knows a good thing when they see it, and the truth is, Jesus does set captives free. However, for us it has never been about book sales; it's been about helping hurting people, and that mission has continued into the twenty-first century.

The message of our freedom in Christ has never been more needed in young people's lives than today. While there are no new sins in today's world, the intensity of temptation, accusations, and deception has undoubtedly increased. When we first penned this book almost 30 years ago, there was no Internet, no social media, no online bullying, and gender confusion barely showed up on our collective radar.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat present today's students with new challenges. While these platforms have brought some good into the lives of young people, they have also brought us cyberbullying, sexting, and online predators. Our private world and thoughts have become public knowledge, often with unintended and tragic consequences. While technology has

many advantages, it can also produce a whole new level of hurt, rejection, and bondage. Years ago, the average person couldn't simply create a public persona that wasn't real. Today, one can create an artificial online identity in minutes, using avatars, manipulated photos, and a little bit of creative writing. The sad thing is that even believers often prefer their exaggerated online identity to their real identity in Christ.

In addition to the age-old challenge of same-sex attraction and the growing incidence of gender confusion, we are now expected to accept a whole new and growing list of false sexual identities. Using terms such as straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning is no longer adequate. We are now being asked to learn over one hundred terms and expressions of sexual identity.* The world is making them up so fast it's hard to keep up.

Many other alarming developments and trends are affecting our youth. The number of single-parent households has reached an all-time high. Sexual innuendo in music, movies, and cable series isn't just innuendo anymore, it's explicit. Teens face unprecedented violence in schools. Images like those of teenagers running in terror from their school with their hands up at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, and children fleeing from Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012, have been repeated hundreds of times. The fear of being victimized in what is supposed to be a safe place is real, not imagined. Right now, as we update this book, COVID-19 has caused us to feel more alone and isolated than ever. Stress, depression, obesity, and suicide are all at record high levels. More than ever, teens are being forced to grow up—and fast!

The good news is while troubles have undoubtedly grown, the solution to finding real and lasting freedom is the same. The answer is still Jesus Christ, the Bondage Breaker. Nothing about our new world has surprised Jesus; this world and its technologies don't confuse or overwhelm Him. Jesus outmaneuvered Satan at the cross, and He can outmaneuver him again in your life.

When we first wrote *The Bondage Breaker Youth Edition*, we had

* Nicholas Hellen, "BBC films teach children of '100 genders or more,'" *Sunday Times* (London), September 8, 2019.

no idea that this book and *Stomping Out the Darkness* (published by Bethany House) would launch an international youth ministry. We are so grateful that Harvest House Publishers has agreed to publish an updated edition of this book. Their vision for helping young people has allowed us to travel the world, proclaiming the message of freedom in Christ, and has opened many doors for us to help youth workers, parents, and teens. We have conducted over 150 Stomping Out the Darkness student conferences worldwide, helping young people discover their identity and freedom in Christ. Our experiences and time with young people prompted us to write dozens of youth books and study guides. We also developed special parent nights and youth worker summits to train leaders. Today, we continue to offer free, three-day EPIC (Experiencing Personal Identity in Christ) Summits several times a year in both live and virtual formats.

Since this book was first published, we have gained a lot more experience and knowledge. For this reason, we believe this latest edition is a better book. While the underlying biblical message and outline is the same, the spiritual challenges facing us have increased. The world has developed even more ways to trap us in bondage. Thankfully, none of these new deceptions can overpower what Christ did on the cross to purchase our freedom.

In the beginning, we hoped that this book would help many students claim their freedom. But now, hundreds of thousands of readers later, we have countless proofs and testimonies that Jesus is still setting captives free.

One young man wrote to us to tell us that his life had been changed by his encounter with Jesus through the Steps to Freedom in Christ. Not only was he transformed, but he went on to tell us that shortly after reading the book, he was at a Christian camp, and during their free time, he went back to the camp cafeteria to get a snack. There in the lodge, he witnessed the camp cook cutting himself with one of the knives. The cook did not see him, but just watched the blood trickle down his own arm. The student boldly asked the cook, “Do you hear voices tell you to do that?”

Undoubtedly, the camp cook was startled by the presence of the student and the frank question, but then he answered truthfully, “Yes.”

The student responded, “Do you want to get rid of those voices?”
“Yes,” said the cook.

Then the 16-year-old student took the 30-something-year-old cook through the Steps to Freedom in the back of the *Bondage Breaker Youth Edition*. Six months later, the young man met the cook again at a gathering. At first, he barely recognized him. It was as if the camp cook had had a complete makeover, both physically and spiritually. If you have found freedom, you can help others find freedom.

We want to acknowledge all the incredible students who shared their lives with us at conferences and in writing. What you shared was so private and personal; it was a privilege to see God set you free in Christ. Thanks for being so real and authentic.

There were many emotional moments as we recalled the pain and torment you suffered and unspeakable joy as you claimed truth. We have learned so much from every one of you as you shared your spiritual journeys with us.

We also want to acknowledge the youth workers who have labored and shepherded so lovingly in the lives of young sheep. Thank you for your sacrifice and commitment to young people! The message of our freedom in Christ must be multiplied and shared. We feel that when it comes to meeting the needs of today’s teens, no one is better equipped than believing parents and the local church and its shepherds.

This book has passed through more than just the hands of students and youth workers. Hundreds of doctoral students, pastors, and ministry colleagues have used this book and helped us improve it.

No person has helped us more in this area than our dear friend Dr. Robert Saucy. Thank you for holding us accountable to the highest standards of biblical integrity. We are indebted to you, and so is the body of Christ.

A special thanks to Bob Hawkins Jr. for being such a vital partner in ministry.

Since it was first released, hundreds of thousands of students have

read *The Bondage Breaker Youth Edition*. Now you can also experience, free of charge, powerful 20-minute identity and freedom messages that go with this book and *Stomping Out the Darkness*. Go to Infusionnow.org, where the videos can be viewed in both English and Spanish.

Through the Bible and the voice of the Holy Spirit, Jesus reveals Himself and speaks His foundational, unchanging truth to each generation. We can learn a lot from Jesus's followers who came before us. That is why we have included quotes from ancient believers at the beginning of each section and chapter of this book. Take some time to read these statements, look up words or phrases you don't understand, ponder and discuss them with a believing friend or pastor, and take full ownership of what you learn. The Lord may even prompt you to do some research to find out more about each of these saints of old—what they faced and how they influenced the world for Christ. We pray that as you read and grapple with these quotes,

- God will give you a better understanding of Satan and his schemes to try to undermine your firm foundation in Christ.
- You will grow more confident that Jesus and His truth are the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:18).
- You will be blown away by the reality that, in Christ, you are part of a family and a powerful movement that spans the globe and the centuries. You are not alone; you have joined the “assembly of God’s firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23 NLT).
- You will be inspired to ask and consider how Jesus Christ, the Bondage Breaker, wants to use you to bring true freedom to those around you and to future generations.

We hope God speaks to you as you read this new version and that you experience all your freedom in Christ.

—Neil and Dave

For more information concerning training for youth workers, student conferences, parent events, freedom counseling, or other resources, contact:



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FREE AT LAST!

A few years ago, I (Neil) was speaking in a church about spiritual deceptions. I spoke from 1 Timothy 4:1: “The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” After my message I was surrounded at the front of the sanctuary by hurting people.

Sitting about halfway back in the sanctuary was a 22-year-old woman who had been weeping uncontrollably since the service ended. Several people had tried to comfort her, but she wouldn’t allow anyone to get near her. Finally, a church staff member cut through the crowd around me and said, “I’m sorry, folks, but we need Dr. Anderson back here right away.”

As I approached the young woman, I could hear her sobbing, “He understands! He understands!” We were able to get her out of the sanctuary and into a private office. After she calmed down, I set up a time when we could meet.

When Nancy arrived for her appointment, her face was marked by ugly, open scratch wounds. “I’ve been scratching myself like this ever since last week, and I can’t control it,” she admitted with embarrassment.

Nancy described her horrible childhood, which included an abusive father and a grandmother who identified herself as a black witch.

“When I was three years old, I received my guardians—spirit guides,” she continued. “They were my companions, telling me how to live and what to say. I never questioned whether having spirit guides was anything but normal until my mother took me to Sunday school. Then I began to suspect that my spirit guides might not be good for me. When I asked my parents about it, my father beat me. I never asked again!”

To deal with the increasing torment that her spirit guides brought to her life, Nancy resorted to rigid personal discipline. In her high school years, she trusted Christ as her Savior. But instead of leaving, her “guardians” continued to harass her.

After high school, Nancy joined the Marines. Determined to become the toughest female Marine, she won awards for her discipline. But her spiritual torment kept pushing her mind and emotions to the edge. She refused to tell anyone about her mental battle for fear that she would be labeled insane. Finally, the pressure overcame her, and she snapped. Nancy quietly accepted a medical discharge and retreated to a lonely existence of inner turmoil and pain. This was her condition when she came to church and heard me talk about deceiving spirits.

“Finally, someone understands me!” Nancy said tearfully.

“Would you like to get rid of your spirit guides?” I asked.

There was a long pause. “Will they really leave, or will I go home and be thrashed by them again?”

“You will be free,” I assured her.

Two hours later, Nancy *was* free—and was hugging us with an openness she had never known before. “Now I can have people over to my house!” she exclaimed joyfully.

THE REALITY OF THE DARK SIDE

Nancy’s experience is not uncommon. Although the degree of her problem was somewhat exceptional, we have come to realize that Paul had in mind every believer when he wrote, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). We have ministered

to thousands of young Christians all over the world who are being deceived and are living defeated lives. This is a real tragedy, because their heavenly Father desires for them to live a free and productive life in Christ.

Our journey into this realm of ministry did not come by choice. We were never curious about demonic activity or the occult. The lure of knowledge and occultic power never appealed to us.

On the other hand, we have always been disposed to believe what the Bible says about the spiritual world, even when it seems to conflict with the Western worldview. As a result, the Lord has been bringing Christians like Nancy to see us. They have been dominated by thought patterns, habits, and behaviors that have kept them from living free and full lives.

Through years of learning and ministering, we have a better understanding of how the truth sets us free and of the need to resist the devil as well as submit to God (James 4:7). Ministries that ignore the reality of the spiritual world don't have an adequate answer, but neither do some deliverance ministries that see the problem as only spiritual. God is reality, and He relates to us as whole people—and His Word provides the total answer for all those who live in this fallen world.

GOD WANTS YOU FREE AND GROWING IN CHRIST

Understanding the process of sanctification (being set apart for God's special purpose) is critical since God's will for our lives is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). "We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ...and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:15,13 *NIV*). If God has given us everything we need to mature in Christ (2 Peter 1:3), then why aren't more Christians growing in Christ? Some young believers are no more Christ-like now than they were five or ten years ago. Paul says, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). Every year of our Christian life, we should be able to say, "I have grown in my faith, and now I love

God and others more this year than I did last year.” If we can’t say that, then we are not growing.

Part of the reason for this immaturity and worldliness is given in 1 Corinthians 3:2-3: “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to consume it. But even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like ordinary people?” According to Paul, some Christians are not even able to receive good teaching from the Bible because of unresolved conflicts in their lives. What is needed is some way to resolve these personal and spiritual conflicts through genuine repentance and faith in God. That is the purpose of this book.

In our first book, *Stomping Out the Darkness* (published by Bethany House Publishers), we focused more on the personal side of the young believer’s life in Christ and walk by faith. That book deals with the foundational issues of your identity in Christ and outlines practical steps on how to live by faith, walk according to the Spirit, renew your mind, manage your emotions, and resolve the emotional problems of your past through faith and forgiveness. (To see the complete picture, we strongly suggest you read *Stomping Out the Darkness* as well as this book. Also, you may want to visit our website Infusionnow.org and view the 20-minute identity and freedom messages we have prepared for you. This content is provided free of charge.)

Before we received Christ, we were slaves to sin. But because of what Christ did on the cross, sin’s power over us has been broken. Satan no longer owns us, and he has no right to tell us what to do. He is a defeated foe, but he is committed to keeping us from realizing that. The father of lies can block your victory as a Christian if he can deceive you into believing that you are nothing but a product of your past—ruled by sin, stuck in the failure mode, and controlled by your habits.

Paul said, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). You are free in Christ, but you will be defeated if the devil can fool you into believing you are nothing more than a sin-sick product of your past. Nor can Satan do anything about your position in

Christ, but if he can deceive you into believing what the Scripture says isn't true, you will live as though it isn't. People are in bondage to the lies they believe. That is why Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

We don't believe in instant maturity. It will take us the rest of our lives to renew our minds and be conformed to the image of God (Romans 12:1). But it doesn't take long to help young people resolve their personal and spiritual issues and find their freedom in Christ. Being alive and free in Christ is part of *positional* sanctification, which is the basis for *progressive* sanctification. In other words, we are not trying to *become* children of God, we *are* children of God who are becoming like Christ. Once people are established alive and free in Christ through real repentance and faith in God, watch them grow! They have a new thirst for the Word of God, and they know who they are in Christ because "the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

In this book we want to describe the spiritual battle that we are in and how young Christians can find their victory in Christ. Part 1 explains your position of freedom, protection, and authority in Christ. Part 2 warns of your vulnerability to temptation, accusation, and deception. Part 3 presents the Steps to Freedom in Christ, which will enable you to submit to God and resist the devil (James 4:7).

WHY IS THIS WORLD IN BONDAGE?

Many teens have asked why God put us in a world filled with so much bondage. The truth is, God didn't. Instead, He placed us in a perfect garden in fellowship with Him. We are the ones who chose to rebel and break off our relationship with Him. Since that terrible moment back in the garden, God has been trying to show us the way back to Him. But God doesn't just want to show us how to be saved and forgiven; He wants to reveal to us how to walk free.

Deuteronomy 8:2 says, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you

would keep his commands” (NIV). God wants to show us what is in our hearts. That’s what the *Steps to Freedom* are all about, encountering Christ so we can learn and understand the hidden things in our hearts.

Over the years, we have surveyed young people from all over the United States and many overseas groups and found that 70 percent who attended a Stomping Out the Darkness student conference found their freedom. In other words, they could identify a specific area of freedom in their lives, such as freedom from depression, anxiety, or a particular fear. Tormenting thoughts, anger, and negative self-talk went away. Those struggling with gender dysphoria experienced clarity and understanding of their true sexual identity.

When those students who attended the event also entered a six-to ten-week follow-up small group, the rate rose to 90 percent. They experienced a new sense of self-worth and negative habits dissolved in about six weeks.

Are you perhaps one of those Christians who lives in bondage to fear, depression, habits you can’t break, thoughts or inner voices you can’t get away from, or sinful behavior you can’t escape? God has made every provision for you to be alive and free in Christ.

The contrast between bondage and freedom in a believer’s life is powerfully illustrated in the following letter. Unlike Nancy, by all appearances, this guy was a normal, churchgoing Christian who appeared to be living a very successful life in both his family and career. But he wasn’t experiencing his freedom in Christ.

Dear Neil,

I contacted you because I had been experiencing a host of attacks. My emotional troubles were probably rooted in my childhood experiences with horror movies, Ouija boards, and so on. I clearly remember fearing a visit from devilish forces after I saw the movie titled *The Blood of Dracula*.

My father had a pretty hot temper and was given to emotional outbursts. My survival response was to sulk and blame myself for upsetting him. Bottling my emotions

inside became a way of life. As I grew into adulthood, I continued to blame myself for any and all personal shortcomings and misfortunes.

Then I accepted Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I grew spiritually over the next several years, but I never enjoyed complete peace. There was always a lingering doubt about my relationship with God, whom I saw as distant and stern. I had difficulty praying, reading the Bible, and paying attention to the pastor's sermons. I seriously questioned the purpose of life. I experienced horrible nightmares that woke me up screaming.

It was during my time of prayer with you that I finally found freedom in Christ. I realized that God is not a harsh, aloof disciplinarian, but a loving Father who takes joy in my accomplishments. I experienced a great release when I prayed through the final Step.

Now when I read God's Word, I understand it like never before. I have developed a more positive attitude, and my relationship with my Lord has completely changed. Since our meeting, I haven't had one nightmare.

Neil, I'm afraid there are many Christians like me out there, leading lives of "quiet desperation" due to the attack of demonic forces. If I can fall prey to these forces and seem all right, so can others.

Throughout these pages we want to introduce you to the One who has already overcome the darkness and secured your freedom: Jesus Christ, the Bondage Breaker!

PART I

TAKE COURAGE!

Furthermore, we are instructed by our sacred books how from certain angels, who fell of their own free will, there sprang a more wicked demon brood, condemned by God... Their great business is the ruin of humanity. Accordingly, they inflict upon our bodies diseases and other outrageous calamities. And by violent assaults, they hurry the soul into sudden and extraordinary excesses... By an influence equally obscure, demons... breathe into the soul, and rouse up its corruptions with furious passions and vile excesses.

TERTULLIAN (AD 160–220)

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN THE SHADOWS

Paul also says, "The unspiritual man does not know the things which come from the Spirit of God." Contentious and proud wisdom is rightly described as earthy, unspiritual and devilish because as long as the soul seeks earthly glory it is deprived of spiritual grace and remains cut off from God. For now it thinks only what comes naturally to it since it originally fell. It is persuaded by the delusion of an evil spirit to do things which are wicked and harmful.

BEDE (AD 673–735)

|| (Neil) remember counseling a young Christian who was in deep spiritual, mental, and emotional confusion. At one point before I began meeting with her, she wrote the following prayer, then ten minutes later unsuccessfully tried to kill herself with an overdose of pills:

Dear God,

Where are you? How can you watch and not help me? I hurt so bad, and you don't even care. If you cared you'd make it stop or let me die. I love you, but you seem so far away. I can't hear you or feel you or see you, but I'm supposed to

believe you're here. Lord, I feel them and hear them. They are here. I know you're real, God, but they are more real to me right now. Please make someone believe me, Lord. Why won't you make it stop? Please, Lord, please! If you love me you'll let me die.

A Lost Sheep

We have met hundreds of young Christians like the one who wrote this sad note. Most of them didn't attempt suicide as this one did, but many of them talked about dark desires to do so. And nearly all of them admitted to the presence of "them"—inner urges or voices that bothered them, tempted and taunted them, accused them, or threatened them.

The fact that people struggle with negative or opposing thoughts is well accepted. We often caution young people who make appointments to talk with us that they may have opposing thoughts such as, "Don't go; they can't help you." Or distracting thoughts will pop into their minds, such as, "I don't want to go" or "I've tried this before and it didn't work." One person wrote to me (Neil), "Every time I try to talk to you, or even think about talking to you, I completely shut down. Voices inside literally yell at me: 'No!' I've even considered killing myself to end this terrible battle going on inside. I need help!"

Over the years, wherever we go we have surveyed Christian high school students, asking them, "Have you heard 'voices' in your head like there was a subconscious self talking to you, or have you struggled with really bad thoughts?" Seventy percent answered yes! If you struggle with tempting or accusing thoughts in your head, you're not alone. You may not have told anyone about your experiences because you fear that people would think you're a mental case. Maybe you have kept quiet because *you* think you're crazy. Maybe you have been taught that Christians can't have these kinds of problems.

But the time has come for us to wake up to the fact that Satan is real and that demons exist. If you hear tormenting voices in your head or feel a dark presence in your room at night (and 47 percent of those students we've surveyed have), you're not crazy; you're under attack. You

need to know how to defend yourself against Satan's fiery darts. That's what this book is all about.

Many Christians don't complain about hearing voices, but their minds are filled with such confusion that their daily walk with Christ is completely discouraging. When they try to pray, they begin thinking about a million things they should be doing. When they sit down to read the Bible or a good Christian book, they can't concentrate. When they have an opportunity to serve the Lord in some way, they give up because of thoughts of self-doubt: "I'm not a strong Christian"; "I don't know enough about the Bible"; "I'm too young"; "I have too many sinful thoughts." Instead of being victorious, dynamic Christians full of joy, they trudge through life under a cloud, just trying to hang on until Jesus comes. Some of this discouragement is certainly because of our own faulty thinking, but it can also reflect deception from the enemy.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BONDAGE

Where do the evil voices, bad thoughts, guilty feelings, and confusion come from? One of the main reasons so many youth are in bondage today is because they don't know the answers to these questions. They are living under a number of misconceptions about the spiritual world that must be corrected. Here is what some Christians falsely believe—and Satan loves it.

1. *Demons were busy when Christ was on earth, but they're not around much today.* Young Christians who believe this after reading what God's Word says and seeing what is going on in the world today are not facing the facts. The New Testament clearly says that believers will wrestle "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Paul goes on to describe every piece of spiritual armor we are to put on to defend ourselves against "the flaming arrows of the evil one" (verse 16). If dark spiritual powers are no longer attacking believers, why would Paul warn us about them and insist that we arm ourselves against them?

The powers and forces Paul wrote about are still around today. You

can see it around your school. How many friends do you know who are involved in Internet activities, video games, and movies that have a spiritual edge? The demonic is portrayed as just a plot theme or an entertainment device. The truth is, the demonic is real. Online astrology, occult games, and cinematic experiences can potentially open a door to fear and to the enemy.

The kingdom of darkness is still present, and Satan wants to make our lives miserable and keep us from walking strong and tall in Christ. If you don't believe that Satan and his demons are present and busy, then either God or you will have to take the blame for all the evil Satan is dumping on you and the rest of the world.

2. *What early Christians called demonic activity is only mental illness.* If one of your friends were to report hearing inner voices or sensing a dark presence in his room, most secular counselors would say, "He has a mental problem; he's paranoid." Very few would think it's a spiritual problem, the activity of Satan's demons. Why? Because a natural explanation is the best such counselors can do without a belief in God or the existence of Satan. The secular world's understanding of our problems is simply incomplete. It ignores the reality of the spiritual world.

Not all physical, mental, and emotional problems young Christians experience are specifically demonic. But ignoring the presence and influence of Satan and his demons will leave many problems unsolved.

3. *Some problems are psychological and some are spiritual.* This false belief suggests that the human soul and spirit are separate, which isn't true. There is no problem that isn't psychological, because there is never a time when our mind, emotions, and will are not involved. And there is no problem that isn't spiritual, because there is no time when God is not present or when it is safe for us to take off the armor of God.

Saying that a problem is only psychological overlooks how God and Satan are involved. Saying that a problem is only spiritual ignores our responsibility for how we must think, feel, and choose. To deal with our inner conflicts, we must consider both the psychological and spiritual influences that are at work.

4. *Christians can't be affected by demonic forces.* This is a lie that the devil would love us to swallow so we will drop our defenses against him.

If Satan can't touch Christians, why are we told to put on the armor of God, to resist the devil, to stand firm, and to be alert? If we can't be deceived by Satan, why does Paul talk about our relationship to the powers of darkness as a wrestling match? Those who say the enemy can't influence us are the ones who are most vulnerable to him.

5. *The activity of demons is only seen in weird behavior or gross sin.* There are still cases of demon activity today like that of the wild demon-possessed man called "Legion" in Luke 8:26-39. But most young Christians under spiritual attack lead fairly normal lives while experiencing serious inner problems for which no natural cause or solution has been found. Because they think that satanic attack is involved only in the cases of mass murderers or violent sex criminals, these ordinary people wonder what's wrong with them and why they can't just "do better."

Satan's first and best strategy is deception. Paul warned, "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). It is not a few weird or violent people who are the main problem. Rather, it is Satan's subtle deception and invasion of the lives of "normal" believers like us that keeps us from being effective.

6. *Freedom from spiritual bondage is the result of a power encounter with demonic forces.* Freedom from spiritual problems and bondage does not result from a power encounter; it results from a *truth* encounter. Satan is a liar, and he will work undercover at all costs. But the truth of God's Word exposes him and his lies. His demons are like cockroaches that scurry for the shadows when the light comes on. Satan's power is in the lie, and when his lie is exposed by the truth, his plans are foiled. Satan's power was broken at the cross. He is a defeated foe.

Then how can he be so effective? Let me illustrate with a story from childhood.

When I (Neil) was a boy growing up in the country, my dad, my brother, and I would visit our neighbor's farm. The neighbor had a yappy little dog that scared the socks off me. When it came barking

around the corner, my dad and brother stood their ground, but I ran. Guess who the dog chased! I escaped to the top of our pickup truck while the little dog yapped at me from the ground.

Everyone except me could see that the little dog had no power over me except what I gave it by not standing up to it. The dog had no power to throw me up on the pickup; it was my belief that put me up there. That dog controlled me by using my mind, my emotions, my will, and my muscles, all of which were motivated by fear. Finally, I gathered up my courage, jumped off the pickup, and kicked a small rock at the mutt. And it ran!

Satan is like that yappy little dog: He deceives us into fearing him more than God. His power is in the lie. He is the father of lies (John 8:44) who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). As a result, the whole world is under the influence of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

The devil can do nothing about who you are in Christ. But if he can deceive you into believing his lies about you and God, you will spend a lot of time on top of the pickup truck! You don't have to outshout him or outmuscle him to be free of his control. You just have to *out-truth* him. *Believe, declare, and act upon the truth of God's Word*, and you will ruin Satan's strategy.

This concept has had a dramatic effect on our counseling. Often when a spiritual conflict was exposed in someone being counseled, it would turn into a power encounter. The person would become unconscious, run out of the room, or start behaving like he or she was crazy. Our usual first approach was to get the demon to expose itself, then command it to leave. This process was often very difficult for the person we were trying to help. And though progress was made, the process would usually have to be repeated.

We have learned from the Bible and from our experience that *truth* is what sets people free. The power of Satan is in the lie, and the power of the believer is in knowing the truth. We are to pursue the truth that sets us free.

Also, people who are in bondage are not liberated by what the counselor does but by what *they* do. It's not what Neil or Dave or your pastor or youth leader believes that breaks Satan's grip on your life; it's

what *you* believe. And what you believe must be the truth. Notice the following verses:

- You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32 NIV).
- Jesus said... “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).
- When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13).
- [Jesus prayed to the Father,] “I’m not asking you to take them [Christians] out of the world, but to keep them safe from Satan’s power... Make them pure and holy through teaching them your words of truth” (John 17:15,17 TLB).
- Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist (Ephesians 6:14 NIV).
- Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true... think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

When God first disciplined the early church, as recorded in Acts 5, He did so in a dramatic way. Two people dropped dead when their sin was discovered. What was the issue: drugs, sex? No, the issue was *truth*. Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (verse 3). God wanted the church to know that Satan the deceiver can ruin us if he can get us to believe and live a lie. That’s why it is so important to take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

SETTING CAPTIVES FREE

Before Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, God empowered Him and His hand-picked disciples to take authority over demonic powers in the world. But something radical happened at the

cross and in the resurrection that permanently changed the way we encounter spiritual forces.

First, Jesus's death and resurrection defeated and disarmed the rulers and authorities of the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 2:15). Before the cross, "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18) had not yet been given to Christ. But Matthew 28:18 assures us that the resurrected Christ now has all authority. Because of the cross, Satan is defeated, and he has no authority over those who are in Christ. Believing the truth of Christ's victory and Satan's defeat is the first step to successfully putting down the enemy's attempts to discourage and hassle you.

Second, in Christ's death and resurrection every believer is made alive with Him and is now seated with Him (Ephesians 2:5-6). You no longer need someone else—like a pastor or youth leader—to take authority over Satan for you. You now reside in Jesus Christ, who has all authority. To resist the devil, you need to understand and exercise your position and authority in Christ.

Freedom is your inheritance as a Christian. That's why Paul wrote:

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can see something of the future he has called you to share. I want you to realize that God has been made rich because we who are Christ's have been given to him! I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in heaven, far, far above any other king or ruler or dictator or leader. Yes, his honor is far more glorious than that of anyone else either in this world or in the world to come (Ephesians 1:18-21 TLB).

When Satan harasses you, you may want to crawl under a rock in misery, like the girl whose prayer note opened this chapter. You may cry out for God to deliver you, like Jesus miraculously and instantly delivered the demonized people in the Gospels. But your deliverance has already been accomplished because of Christ's work on the cross

and His resurrection. That's the good news Paul was trying to tell us about in his prayer. Since you are with Christ in the light, you never again need to live in the shadows.

But it is your responsibility to choose the truth and resist the devil. From your position in Christ, you must resist the devil, renounce (which means to turn your back on) any ways by which you have participated in his schemes, confess your sin, and forgive those who have offended you. These critical Steps to Freedom in Christ are the focus of part 3 of this book.

The girl who called herself "A Lost Sheep" in the letter at the beginning of this chapter finally gained God's view of her condition. Four years after she wrote her desperate prayer, she wrote this response based on her new understanding of God's provision for her in Christ. Her words are based on Scripture. Allow them to shine some light into the shadows of your life.

My Dear Lost Sheep,

You ask me where I am. My child, I am with you and I always will be. You are weak, but in Me you are strong. I love you so much that I can't let you die. I am so close that I feel everything you feel.

I know what you are going through, for I am going through it with you. But I have set you free, and you must stand firm. You do not need to die physically for my enemies to be gone, but be crucified with Me and I will live in you, and you shall live with me. I will direct you in paths of righteousness. My child, I love you and I will never forsake you, for you are truly Mine.

Love, God

TRUTH ENCOUNTER

READ

John 8:32; 14:6; 16:13

REFLECT

1. Could you relate to the Christians in this chapter who felt spiritually oppressed? What experiences have you had?
2. Have you been exposed to any of the misconceptions talked about in this chapter? Did you accept any of them as true? How did those misconceptions affect your life?
3. Do you feel you fully understand how to use your authority in Christ and resist the devil? What can you learn about your authority in Christ from the following Scriptures? Luke 9:1-2; 10:1,17; Ephesians 1:16-23
4. Do you ever feel that your personal walk with Christ is incomplete or that you're not growing? In what ways?

RESPOND

Take a few moments to pray, and ask the Lord to reveal to your mind any misconceptions that you might have about bondage or the spiritual world around us. Ask the Lord to replace any deceptions you might have with His truth. Ask Him to help you grow in your understanding of who you are in Christ.