

## **Forgiveness and Freedom** by James Robison

In the spiritual realm there are two kingdoms in conflict: the kingdoms of light and darkness, life and death, truth and deception. Those influences are calling out to you, not only for your attention, but your devotion. They seek to control every aspect of your life. Sadly, most people tune in the wrong signals. Eventually, rather than you merely having thoughts, those thoughts take hold of you.

From the time man was created and placed in a garden, God fully intended to fellowship with us. He wanted to bless all the earth through the stewardship and oversight of those who knew Him as father, walked in His will according to His ways and fulfilled His purpose. But in that garden there was a deceiver, more subtle and crafty than any beast of the field. You know what happened – they bought the lie. From that moment on, a tragic cycle of defeat began.

God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. That commandment expresses His will for those created in His image. The effect of the fruitfulness of our life will be multiplied. We are continually sowing seeds with our words, deeds and influence. God designed us to have a positive and profound impact on everyone we encounter. But instead, many of us live a life of continuous defeat.

Psalm 78 chronicles the Israelites' cycles of defeat. These events illustrate a spiritual truth – a life lesson that speaks to us today. Throughout history, the people of God have cycled through blessings of God – forgiveness, fruitfulness and restoration – and the curses of sin – arrogance, self-centeredness and bondage. The Old Testament repeatedly recounts how God made His people to walk in his will, but the enemy took them captive, then He set them free. Sadly, the cycles of defeat were foolishly repeated.

Jesus, the promised Messiah, walked in and announced, "What the prophet said is fulfilled. I have come to set the captives free, to restore sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are oppressed." The Jewish people looked at him and said, "We have never been in bondage to anyone. We're descendants of Abraham!" If you read Psalm 78, as well as the minor and major prophets, you will find these people continually lived as slaves. Yet they said to Jesus, "We're not in defeat. We're not in bondage."

We are all born in this world as the children of wrath because of mankind's fall. We must be born again to become the children of God. But from the moment you're born again, the kingdom of deception and destruction seeks to take you captive. When we turn away from the spiritual battle between these two kingdoms and do not walk the path of victory that the Lord has laid out for us, we fall back into bondage. Consider this account of God's chosen people:

The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.

He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan. He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall. He

guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.

But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert? When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?"

When the Lord heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance. Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven.

(Psalm 78:9-24)

Do you see the similarity today? God does great things in our lives, but we wander from His ways, His truth, His life and His love. We pay the price for our rebellion, yet God remains faithful, pouring out "the grain of heaven." We deserve His wrath, yet He opens the doors of heaven.

God wants to break every bondage in our lives. He longs for us to live in fellowship with Him, hearing His voice and responding to His love. Only through intimacy with God can we receive freedom, fullness and fruitfulness that He wants for us.

We spend our time going to church, but God desires us to *become* the church. It is not a place; it is a people. We are to live to pierce the darkness, to bring about a transformation of everything we come in contact with because we have been undeniably set free.

Say to the Lord, "God, I'm in your hand. What's your purpose for me?" He wants to shape Christ-likeness in you. All things work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. That's you. He wants to shape Christ in you.

The starting point for this process is His word. The word is alive! And I make you this promise – it's really God's promise – if you will get His word out of that leather binder and bind it up in your heart, it will be like a fire in your bones. It will be like honey, gold and silver tried in a fire, reflecting the beauty of the purified work He has accomplished in your life. When you look at your life, you will see Jesus. And when God looks at you, He will see Himself in you, refined like silver.

God's word is true. He is faithful to forgive and restore you to His freedom. So make the choice today and every day to live according to His ways, so that you can receive His life and impact those around you for His kingdom.

*Adapted from the series "Living Free" with James Robison and Robert Morris.*