

## Battle Plan Series

Every day we are confronted with temptations that attempt to distract us from our primary focus of service and obedience to Christ. These temptations often derail our attempts to live a godly life. Every day we are engaged in a battle to defeat these temptations and to stay the course. What I hope to do in this series is to review some of what the Bible teaches as to methods and strategies we can use to fight successfully. I plan to provide you with 10 or 11 specific statements that you should be able to make about yourself and about your spiritual life. These will be supported with passages of Scripture to help give you a strong foundation for those statements. If these statements are true of you, you will be in a better position for success in this battle against sin, lust, and temptation. If the statements are not true of you, it should provide motivation and a goal that you can work on in order to improve areas of weakness.

You can download the Battle Plan Chart here: <http://robert.me/2w6E0sK>

The first thing we need to realize is that this battle is universal among Christians. As you read this material you are going to be tempted to think that this is a battle for someone else. Often, when we speak of lusts, as we will in the following section, people immediately focus on sexual lust and if that doesn't happen to be your problem, you might stop reading thinking that you have everything under control. That is a dangerous position to be in because if you are not aware of a battle for your heart and soul, the devil has you right where he wants you. But as soon as you realize that this applies to you just as much as anyone else and as soon as you take up arms to defeat your own lusts, you will find a battle greater than you ever imagined could exist.

The first step, then, is to ask ourselves the question: “Do I really want to pursue righteousness and holiness, and count everything loss in order to know Christ and the power of His resurrection in my life?” In order to accurately answer this question, there are some truths we need to consider.

In 1 John 2:15-17 we read: 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 lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

There is a distinction between the things of the world and the things of God. These verses very clearly teach that it is not possible to love the world and love God at the same time. This means a decision is required. Do I really want to abandon the world for Christ? This is an overarching decision, but it is also a decision that has to be made hundreds of times a day. Making the decision during a momentary temptation without having made it as a principle of your life will make the battle ultimately impossible to win. So, before you go any further you need to decide – Christ or the world.

In this passage, the Bible focuses on lust. Lust is a strong desire that is excessive to the point of being sinful. In this passage we have three components given for worldliness – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We don't have time to go into each one in detail, but if you think about it you will realize that many of the things we do and decisions we make are made based on these lusts. We covet what we see other people have. We lust for sex or excitement or other flesh-based pleasures. We desire to have people look up to us as someone important or powerful or contented. Yes, we can be proud of our contentment and wish for others to be jealous of our contented life. All of these temptations come from the world and not from God.

In James 1:14-15 we read this: But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Here's the issue then. The world and Satan provide attractions that feed the lusts that John referred to. But our temptations come from within us, from our own lusts or desires and we are drawn away by them. Everybody has their own set of personalized lusts. Because of them, we are pulled in a wrong direction. The desires come from deep within us. They are part of our sin nature, our fallenness, our brokenness. As these desires are conceived and gestate within us they give birth to sin. Sin is a thought or deed that is not within the will and character of God. These sins begin to grow and then, as James writes, they bring forth death. The Bible teaches that sin has wages and those wages are death.

A Christian, having been born again and now a child of God, has a new desire in competition with the old tendency and therein lies the conflict. Paul writes it this way in Galatians 5:17 - For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

So this leads us back now to the first point in what I'm calling Battle Strategies for the war on lust and sin. The first step is to ask ourselves, "Do I really want to pursue righteousness and holiness, and count everything loss in order to know Christ and the power of His resurrection in my life?" Do I really want this? Am I willing to work hard, suffer and sweat to gain it?

## Part 2

Last time we asked the question, , "Do I really want to pursue righteousness and holiness, and count everything loss in order to know Christ and the power of His resurrection in my life?" Do I really want this? Am I willing to work hard, suffer and sweat to gain it?

This is not a trite question. You shouldn't just read it and go on. In order to help us think about this, I'd like to look at several passages of Scripture.

The Bible speaks about fleeing some things and pursuing others. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." One of the things that should be pursued is holiness. To pursue means to chase down or chase after. You've seen the police chases. Several squad cars are seen pursuing a car speeding to get away. The point is they are trying to catch the person. They are not just following along after it like they would be during non-chase normal traffic situations. So we are to chase down holiness, which the writer says we need if we want to see the Lord. Do you have the desire to see the Lord? Do you have the desire to chase holiness? Are you chasing it?

1 Timothy 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

There are things to flee, but in this case I'm focusing on the pursuit. Here we are told to pursue several traits. Look these over and ask yourself, "Am I chasing these things?" Look at each one of these traits one at a time. Do I have a desire chase them? Am I willing to ask God for the desire to chase them? Do I want to chase righteousness? Godliness? Faith? Love? Patience? Gentleness?

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call

on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Am I fleeing and do I desire to flee youthful lusts. Older people can have youthful lusts. Sex is certainly one of these, but young people also have other inordinate desires for prestige, acceptance, power, recklessness, etc. Sometimes as we get older, these lusts don't disappear. We need to run away from these lusts with as much energy as we can. And here again we are to pursue righteousness and other traits. So if you can picture this, we are to be running away from some things in hot pursuit of other things. This is not a lazy afternoon walk. This is a chase. Paul says he beats his body to keep it under control and in subjection to his mind (1 Corinthians 9:27). The author of Hebrews challenges us by saying that we haven't resisted to bloodshed in our fight against sin (Hebrews 12:4).

And from Philippians 3:8-14 we learn that, like Paul, we should count things that are normally thought of as gain, we should count them loss. Keeping those things would be a negative. The reason is because of the excellence of Christ. Paul wanted to gain Christ. He described his effort as "pressing for the mark." He was like a runner stretching out to be the first person across the line. That is the kind of effort he was making in order to know Christ better and to be found in Him.

Before we go on to any of the strategies that I will outline for us, each one of us needs to ask ourselves the question: Do I really want this? Do I want to pursue righteousness and holiness? Do I really want Christ above all things? If the answer is "no" or if the answer is "I don't think I really care." or if the answer is a shrug of the shoulders, then there's no point in going on.

Next time we'll begin to look at some of the strategies in detail.

## Strategy 1 **My prayer life is active and effective.**

In each of these strategies I put the statement as an affirmative statement of fact. That helps us focus on what the goal is. It is a true or false statement. Within our own hearts we know whether the statement is true for us or not. Is this true: **My prayer life is active and effective.**

Every Christian man should have an active and effective prayer life. James 5:16 says: Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

At the conclusion on the passage in Ephesians where Paul discusses the Christian armor, he writes, “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Ephesians 6:18

The Bible speaks over and over about the importance of prayer and yet praying is a very difficult thing for us. Our lives are busy and taking the time to pray does not seem to us to be as important as God makes it out to be. And yet it is probably the core of our relationship with Christ along with the reading of His Word.

So if we are struggling with temptation, let's not look to a lot of phony remedies and psychological tricks. Let's invest the time it takes to really get to know God by spending some quality time with Him in prayer.

Priority Goal 1: I am going to invest time in prayer each day to strengthen my spiritual life.

If that is your goal, get out your calendar right now and decide when you are going to pray today and add it to your list of things to accomplish.

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## Strategy 2. **I am renewing my mind actively and regularly by reading, memorizing and meditating on Scripture.**

In each of these strategies I put the statement as an affirmative statement of fact. That helps us focus on what the goal is. It is a true or false statement. Within our own hearts we know whether the statement is true for us or not. Is this true: **I am renewing my mind actively and regularly by reading, memorizing and meditating on Scripture.**

Here we have another essential personal discipline that gets overlooked all too often. We are constantly looking for the secret of this or that as though there were hidden methods for being successful in the Christian life. There are no secrets. It's all right there out in the open. We just don't do it.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

It's important to be renewing our minds. God says this is the way that transformation takes place. And the Christian method of renewing the mind is to spend time reading, memorizing and meditating on Scripture. There is no shortcut. Consider these passages:

Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; **And whatever he does shall prosper.** (Emphasis mine.)

It's interesting to note that in verse 4, the Psalmist says that the ungodly are not like this. The question we need to ask ourselves is, "Am I like this?" If not, I am putting myself into the category of the ungodly. Is that where I want to be?

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. **For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.** (Emphasis mine)

Psalm 119:11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

Take some time every day to be in the Scripture. Read a portion and spend some time thinking deeply about it. Begin a Scripture memory plan. Memorize one verse a week or one every other week. Write the verse on a 3x5 card and review it every day until you have it learned and then go on to another.

If you are not doing these basic things, you cannot expect to have victory over sin and temptation you may be facing. Don't look for other solutions. Spending time in prayer and in the Word are foundational to victory.

Priority Goal 2: I am going to spend time each day reading and meditating on the Word of God.

If this is your goal, take a moment right now and determine where in your schedule you will put this important activity. What scripture passage will you begin to read today? Find a notebook where you can jot down questions and thoughts that come to mind as you meditate. Do this now.

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Strategy 3 **I am reminding myself of the fact that sin and the devil are defeated and God will not allow me to be tempted above what I am able.**

These truths are not designed to make us complacent. They are given to us by God to strengthen our resolve and assure us that victory is possible on a daily basis.

Meditate on these passages of Scripture:

Hebrews 2:14-15 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He (Jesus) Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Colossians 2:14–15 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will

also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

Romans 6:6, 14 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

From these passages we can see that sin and Satan have been defeated. God is actively engaged in preventing us from being tempted more than we are able to deal with. The power of sin has been broken. It might not feel that way, but the Bible tells us that this is the truth and so by faith we are to believe it and claim it to be true and to respond accordingly as we face the various temptations that come our way.

Priority Goal 3: Today I will claim the fact that sin and the devil have been defeated and that the power they claim to hold over me is a fraud. God has taken away their power and authority and I am able to overcome whatever temptation is coming my way.

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**Strategy 4: I have taken control of my body and mind, keeping them in subjection.**

Consider the following passages of Scripture:

1 Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Romans 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

2 Corinthians 10:5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

In the Christian life we are charged with responsibility to actively pursue the battle for our minds and bodies. We have the promise of God that as we work, He works (Philippians 2:13). He provides the strength and power to do what needs to be done. In these passages we see Paul's determination to bring his body into subjection. Our bodies should not rule over us and dictate what we will do. Our body has its desires for food, pleasure and sex, but is not to set the agenda. Paul tells us in Romans 6:12 that we should not allow sin to reign in our mortal body. It's our responsibility to set the terms for what our body does.

Even the thoughts of our mind are to be brought under control and "into captivity to the obedience of Christ." That's not an easy proposition, but nevertheless is it not impossible because of the victory Christ has already won for us.

Priority Goal 4: Today, I will take control of my body and mind by the power of the Spirit of God at work within me. I will keep my body and mind under subjection to the will of God.

**Strategy 5: I have put on the whole armor of God so that I will be able to be standing when each skirmish is over.**

Paul gives us this admonition in Ephesians 6: *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”* (Ephesians 6:10–11, NKJV)

We already discussed the fact that our strength and power comes from the Lord. As we work, He works (Philippians 2:12-13). Paul tells us here in Ephesians that we are to be strong in the power of His might. Obviously we are not strong in our own might. Our defeats day by day are enough evidence of that.

In order to stand against the schemes and tricks of the devil, we are to put on the whole armor of God as explained in this passage. There are pieces of armor for the head and for all the other parts of the body. They are mostly defensive, but He has given us the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, as our offensive weapon. We are to put it on. It won't put itself on.

Why do we need this armor? Because we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of wickedness. This is a dirty battle and the enemy is deceitful and cruel. Therefore we need all the protection we can get.

We need the belt of truth. Don't believe the lies, even the lies you tell yourself. Know the truth and base your life on it.

We need the breastplate of righteousness. This cannot be our own righteousness because our righteousness is porous – full of holes. Paul writes in Philippians: *“[that I might] be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;”* (Philippians 3:9, NKJV)

We need God's righteousness as our breastplate.

We are to have the gospel as our footwear. We need to preach the gospel to ourselves every single day. Christ died for our sins and paid the death penalty for us. He was raised the third day and is ascended into heaven where He makes intercession for us.

We are to have the shield of faith to quench those fiery darts. Faith is believing God, taking Him at His word. Faith involves acting on what He says. Faith which doesn't act is not faith. As James tells us, such faith is dead.

We are to have the helmet of salvation. In other words, we are to be a regenerated person. A person who has been given a new heart, a new spirit and new inclinations toward God.

And we are to have the Word of God as our defensive and offensive weapon. Remember how Jesus responded to the temptations Satan brought him? He said, “It is written.” We must now and use our Bibles effectively.

Priority Goal 5: Today I will make sure I have the armor on. I will think through the components of God's armor and make sure I am securely protected by them. I will do this consciously and intentionally with my mind and heart focused on its importance for a successful battle. So that having done all, I will still be standing.

**Strategy 6: I've learned to control my eyes by avoiding the second look. I have made commitments not to look on or lust after evil.**

Consider Job's testimony: "*I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?*" (Job 31:1, NKJV)

Also consider this commitment from David: "*I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me.*" (Psalm 101:3, NKJV)

These are examples of two men who made the decision not to take that second look. Sometimes we cannot help what we see at first, but we can turn our eyes away from those things which incite us to lust for things which God has forbidden.

Lust is the kind of thing that is never satisfied. We think that we will be satisfied if we just take one more look, or one more bite or view one more scene. But lust is going to come back stronger and will demand more and more from us. It is a powerful force!

When Eve was tempted to eat the fruit which God had commanded her not to eat, she looked at it too long. Look what the Scripture says, "*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*" (Genesis 3:6, NKJV)

In Daniel 1:8 we learn that Daniel had purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the king's food. This was a decision he had made ahead of time. We need to make that determination in our hearts and before God that we will respond in righteous ways when temptation is placed in front of us. Trying to make those decisions on the fly doesn't work.

Priority Goal 6: Today I determine not to take that second look when confronted with any kind of temptation.

**Strategy 7: I realize that participating in and supporting immoral, sexual activities is making me a part of the reason God's wrath is coming on the world.**

In Ephesians 5:3 we read the following:

*"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;"* (Ephesians 5:3, NKJV)

Paul continues listing sins and then concludes with this:

*"For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them."* (Ephesians 5:5–7, NKJV)

Paul gives another such list in 1 Corinthians:

*"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."* (1 Corinthians 6:9–10, NKJV)

So God is saying that people who live in the life styles listed here will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and God. Now before you get too self-righteous, be sure to notice that he doesn't include just the sexually immoral. He also includes those who are characterized by covetousness, idolatry, drunkenness, and thievery and swindlers among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Then he goes on (in Ephesians 5) to tell us why we shouldn't involve ourselves with these sorts of behaviors. The reason is because these sins are the reason why God's wrath will come upon the earth. How can we justifiably participate in activities that are the cause of God's judgment? It doesn't make any sense for children of God to live in this way.

When we come to Christ there is a basic change in our nature. In this same passage in verse 8, Paul writes:

*"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light"* (Ephesians 5:8, NKJV)

There is a change. We've gone from darkness to light. It makes no sense to have fellowship or common bond with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph 5:11).

Priority Goal 7: Today, every time I am tempted to look at or participate in anything that God says is wrong, I will remind myself that it is because of these very things that God's wrath is coming. Do I want to be a part of God's reason for judging the world?

**Strategy 8: I am not making any provision for the flesh. I do not make arrangements of time or place to permit sin to gain a foothold.**

One would think that this would be the easiest strategy to implement, but unfortunately it is one of the hardest because in all reality we love our sin too much. So often we have a divided heart. We need to say with David, "Unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11).

Paul writes the following to the Christians at Rome, *"Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."* (Romans 13:13-14, NKJV)

There are lusts which war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11) and these should be avoided because of the destruction they cause within our very person. One of the steps in overcoming these lusts is to avoid making provision for them. When we speak of making provision for something we are talking about making arrangements so that all that is needed will be provided. When a man makes provision for his family so that they will be cared for if he should die, that means he has made financial arrangements for a regular income. He has annotated procedures for handling the paying of bills and maintenance issues around the house. He has labeled important folders and documents so that his family will know where things can be found without a lot of additional hassle.

When we make provision for the lusts of the flesh, we do the same thing. We make sure we know how to locate whatever it is that triggers our lusts. We know where to look in our mind. We know where to look on our computers. We know who to hang around with that will provide the stimulus we "need" to fulfill our lusts. Sometimes these arrangements are so subtle that we hardly realize that we are doing it.

The author of the book of Hebrews writes, *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12, NKJV)

Here we can see that the Word of God is able to help us discern between the thoughts and intents of the heart. Sometimes our heart can plan an innocuous trip to the shopping mall, but the deeper intent of our heart is to search out something -- book, magazine, car showroom, theatre – that will strengthen our fleshly lusts. Our conscious mind almost convinces us that the obvious purpose – shopping for our wife for Christmas – is the real reason, when in reality there is a more sinful, devious purpose that we almost don't see ourselves. Regular reading and meditation on the Word of God will make us more sensitive to those real motives and will encourage the repentance and victory that we desperately need.

As a teenager I was encouraged to write the following sentence in the front of my Bible: ***This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book.*** Haven't you found this to be true in your own experience? When we avoid the Bible, our sensitivity and discernment go down. The Scriptures are able to help us discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. The more we know the Word of God, the more aware we are when our own motives are not really what they seem.

Priority Goal 8: Today I will make no arrangements for the flesh. I will make it as difficult as possible for the flesh to find and use its lusts against me.

**Strategy 9: I'm prepared to flee if necessary; to remove whatever sources of temptation may be a stumbling block to me.**

Paul writes to Timothy, *“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”* (2 Timothy 2:22, NKJV)

The key word here is **run**. We normally have an instinct to run from danger. Why don't we flee the lusts and temptations that are at war against us? I think it's probably because we don't realize or believe the danger that God warns us about in His word.

Paul told the Galatians, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”* (Galatians 6:7–8, NKJV)

I heard a message by Charles Stanley who said that we reap what we sow, later than we sow, and more than we sow. Somehow, I don't think we believe this is true, otherwise we would be running away from our temptations the way Joseph did in Genesis 39.

I think a big part of our problem when it comes to our hesitance to run is simply a matter of unbelief. We don't believe God's warnings of the corruption and death that is inherent in our practice of sinning. Paul warned the Galatians in the passage above that if we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption. Nobody wants to reap corruption, but we don't believe it will happen with us because we are “saved.” I've been thinking a lot lately about this passage from Romans: *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”* (Romans 8:13, NKJV)

This is written to believers, but there is the threat of death in it. Living according to the flesh, following its desires and lusts, results in death. He may not be referring to eternal death, here, but certainly we bring corruption, rotting, into our lives and hearts somehow by not fleeing. Is this really what we want?

Think about it!

Priority Goal 9: Today I will turn around and run away when confronted with the strong lusts of the flesh. I will retreat to the Word of God, prayer, and other believers who will be able to help me flee.

**Strategy 10: I realize that I died with Christ and I am now a new creation. I am living and ordering my life as a resurrected person, not as the old person I used to be.**

This is one of the most important strategies when attempting to win the fight against sin. We can make all sorts of resolutions and put into play all of the self-disciplines that we can muster, but real victory becomes possible when this truth is embraced and put into practice.

In Romans 6:2, Paul asks the question, “How shall we who died to sin, live any longer in it?” He then goes on to explain what he means by this. If you’ve been baptized into Christ – in other words, if you’ve been born again – you were baptized into Christ’s death.

What this means is that when God saves us, He so thoroughly unites us with His Son that there is a oneness established that makes Christ’s history our history. For example in Ephesians 2 we read, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*” (Ephesians 2:4–6, NKJV).

We see here that God raised us up with Christ and has even seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ. So Jesus’ death is our death. His resurrection is our resurrection. His ascension is our ascension.

What does that mean, then, when it comes to the battle against sin? It means that just as Jesus, when He died, died to sin, so we also, when we died with Him, died to sin. Jesus didn’t sin before His death, but He was subject to all of the temptations that we go through. His death put an end to that. We are to reckon ourselves dead with Christ to sin and we are to see ourselves on the resurrection side of things. This is the way Paul puts it:

*“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”* (Romans 6:11–13, NKJV)

The key word here is reckon. We are to count it as true because God says it. We died to sin when we died to Christ and we are to reckon on that being true as we face the many temptations of life. We’ve died and our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3).

He finishes the section in Romans with the words, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.” This is not a command for you not to let sin have dominion. It is a statement of fact. Sin shall not have dominion. Its rule over us has been broken. It has no authority over us even though its power seems awfully strong. We are to believe that and act accordingly.

Priority Goal 10: Moment by moment I will reckon and consider and claim the fact that I died with Christ and I am on resurrection ground and therefore sin does not have any authority or power over me.

**Battle Strategy 11: I am focused on the grace of God in Christ. There is no condemnation since I'm in Christ. God's grace is teaching me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. I realize that focusing on the law will only increase sin's power.**

It is God's goodness that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). When we come to Christ in faith, we are justified so completely that all of our sins have been forgiven and removed by God. In place of those sins, Christ's righteousness is applied to us. We stand completely justified and there is now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Some people interpret this as an excuse to sin. However, God tells us that when His grace is present, it teaches us. If that teaching is not present then the grace is absent as well. Salvation is not just the forgiveness of sin, it is the active working of God in our lives such that teaching occurs. This grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously and godly lives (Titus 2:12).

Sometimes in the commendable effort to squelch sinful tendencies, we reinsert the law. But the scripture clearly tells us that the law actually strengthens sin.

*"The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law."* (1 Corinthians 15:56, NKJV)

*"But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."* (Romans 7:8–11, NKJV)

We might conclude from this that the law itself is sinful. Paul's argument in Romans 7 is that sin is the problem. The law is good. But the nature of law is to arouse sin and show us that it is there. Just think of what happens when you tell a child not to eat the fresh cookies that are cooling on the kitchen counter. You know what happens!

So what we are trying to say in this particular battle plan step is that we need to place more focus on the grace of God, what He has accomplished in Christ, and the fact that in Christ we have been released from the guilt and burden of sin. It might not feel like it, but it is important to know the facts, then believe the facts, and allow our feelings to follow along after.

Priority Goal 11: By faith I will believe and act upon the truth that I have been forgiven of every one of my sins because of Christ.

**Battle Strategy 12: I have someone with whom I can be brutally honest about my temptations and failures. This person helps keep me accountable.**

It is important to have at least one friend with whom you can be honest about your temptations, failures and struggles. Two verses come to mind:

*"As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."* (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV)

*“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”* (James 5:16, NKJV)

This person must be someone whom you can trust. You are not going to share much with someone who you think will be talking to others about what you share with him.

This person also must be someone who has the courage to ask you the tough questions. There are not many people like that. One thing that keeps people from asking tough questions is that they know they will be asked the tough questions back. Both parties in an accountability relationship must be able to answer the same questions. Most of us are trying to hide who we really are. We know we fail and we do not like to let others know that we are not really what we seem to be on the surface.

It often takes time to develop a relationship like this. The relationship will likely start out at a superficial level. But as time progresses and as honest discussions take place, the relationship can deepen to the point of being helpful in the battle against sin in both people’s lives.

In Scripture we read:

*“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”*  
(Proverbs 28:13, NKJV)

Covering sin is not wise or helpful. And so we must be able to share freely with another person. On the other hand, it’s not necessary to be confessing our sins publicly in church gatherings, especially if those sins are not publicly known and are not against the church.

Sometimes people will get together with others who are having the same struggles and then confess to one another in that context. If no one in the group is having success at overcoming the particular sin they are dealing with, there is not much hope for improvement. It can turn into a time where everyone admits that there are no solutions and so rather than seeing improvement and victory, there is a downward spiral that hurts everyone in the group.

What needs to take place is confession of sin with another person who is able to speak truth into your life in such a way so that there can be healing of the damage caused by the sinful behavior. Then the promise of James 5:16 can be realized – healing and help.

Priority Goal 12: I will identify and get together with a Christian friend so that the two of us can have an open and honest accountability relationship.