

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living Study Guide

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 3: THE BATTLE WITHIN ME

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Life and Worldview. This series of lessons examines the choices and practices that are essential for Christian living. To live as the Word of God teaches us means we understand that the choices we make each day affect our faith. It also means learning to pray, practising the commands of God and learning to serve others. These are important lessons for understanding the practice of Christianity and how to live out our faith within our Church community.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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LESSON 3: THE BATTLE WITHIN ME

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Inside each Christian there is a battle between our sinful nature and our new spiritual nature. This lesson looks at how we can rely on the Spirit of God to overcome our sinfulness.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

There is a story often attributed to Native American groups about two dogs which are within every person. These dogs – one good, one evil – are constantly in battle with each other. The good dog represents truth, love, joy, sacrifice, and honesty, while the other represents selfishness, dishonesty, and hatred. The story asks which dog is stronger, which dog will win; it concludes that it's the one that is fed the most. This is a picture of the conflict inside each of us. It is also a battle fought by every believer. Once we are born again, we have become a new person, but one who still fights against tendencies to sin. Praise God we are not expected to fight our sinfulness alone. The Spirit of God is working in us!

GETTING STARTED

1. Do you think that people are mostly good, mostly bad, or a mix of both? What viewpoint do people around you take? What viewpoint has Biblical support?

2. Think about Biblical examples of people who accomplished much for God but occasionally succumbed to their sinful nature. Who were they? What struggle did they have?



STUDY

❖ **THE BATTLE OF FLESH AND SPIRIT:** Every Christian has two opposing capacities dwelling within them – the capacity to do good, and the capacity for evil. Unbelievers, while they are capable of good deeds, do not have the capacity for true godliness and holiness without being born again by the Spirit – having a change in their heart and mind that produces a new Christ-like nature. The Bible refers to our old nature as the flesh (our sinful self), and our new nature as the spirit (the nature of God within us).

❖ **THE FLESH:** The term ‘flesh’ refers to both our physical bodies and our sinful desires that stem from being human. As long as we are alive, we will struggle against sin.

- What do the following verses tell you about letting our flesh (or sinful desires) take control? John 3:6, Ephesians 4:22, Romans 8:5-8

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❖ **THE SPIRIT:** When you become a Christian the flesh still remains, but the Spirit is in you also. God comes to live in you and begins to change your heart and your mind so that you can love the things God loves and desire godliness. This Spirit comes from God and gives life to a new self which is capable of holiness.

- What do the following verses tell you about choosing to live by the Spirit? Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 4:24, 2 Peter 1:3-4

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❖ **THE BATTLE :** The battle inside exists because our old nature is selfish and resists the Spirit. If Christians allow themselves to live by the flesh, they cannot please God. This involves making daily choices to give the Spirit more control.

- Read Romans 7. In this chapter, the Apostle Paul talks about his battle with sin and his desire to obey the law of God. Answer the following questions:

To what does Paul compare having a new life in Christ? (vs.2-3)	
What are we released	



from through Christ? To whom do we now belong? (vs 4)	
What did sin produce in us? (vs. 13)	
How does Paul describe his struggle? (vs. 14-25)	

- How would you describe the struggle between doing what your sinful tendencies dictate and doing what pleases God?

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Paul writes that there is nothing good in our old nature – it cannot please God no matter how hard it tries. When the Holy Spirit comes into a believer’s life, the ways of the flesh become even more evident because the Holy Spirit shows us a better direction. Our old nature sometimes puts up a fight.

- Read the following verses and write down the advice they give on how we should fight this battle:

Romans 8:12-13	
Romans 13:14	
1 John 3:9	

One must actively choose to participate either in the flesh or in the spirit. We choose which nature has control of us! There is no way to entirely escape the flesh, but there is a way to overcome the sinful desires of the flesh through the help of the Holy Spirit.



Learning to live by the Spirit in our new nature while battling Satan in the fight against sin is a life-long challenge. But the difference is that we have been set free from the penalty and power of sin and are free to live for God!

- What is one area in which you know you struggle to do what pleases God? As in the American Native story about feeding the two dogs, how can you choose to feed the Spirit of God within you instead of your sinful desires?

IN SUMMARY

- ❖ There is a battle inside every believer between the capacity to follow the Spirit of God in us, or to follow our sinful nature.
- ❖ The term 'flesh' refers both to our physical bodies and our sinful desires. Everyone since Adam has been born sinful. Sin makes us choose our own way instead of God's way.
- ❖ When we become a Christian, the Spirit of God is in us, but the flesh remains. Our heart and mind begin to change so that we can love the things God loves, but there remains a struggle within us.
- ❖ One must actively choose to either follow the desires of their flesh or do what honors the Spirit. When we resist sin, the desire for Godliness grows greater.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it not possible to be perfect on mere human strength alone? Is there any Biblical evidence of people achieving perfect behaviour apart from God's help?

2. How does the Holy Spirit help us to war against our flesh and choose Godly things?

