



P.O. Box 66540
Albuquerque, NM 87193
505.890.6806
E-mail: irm@liferesource.org
Website: www.liferesource.org

Presentation Transcript
The Work of Overcoming
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This presentation is titled, *The Work of Overcoming* – 20120308. It's the second in a series about *How to Overcome Loss*.

Good afternoon, everybody. Good to see all of you on this overcast day. We're working today on the *Overcoming* series – *Overcoming Loss* – and this is second one. I've called it *The Work of Overcoming*. I sit in an office all day helping people overcome their losses, so I thought I might share what I've learned. This one was given at the Feast in Sandestin. It was the second one. We've already done the first.

So I'm going to review, just a little bit, what we did on the first one. You'll remember we started with Adam and Eve, and we saw that Adam and Eve were born righteous. They hadn't committed any sins – not born, but created that way. But, then, they listened to the devil. God let him into the Garden. And they listened to him, and they bought into what he said, and that caused them to make bad choices. And one of those choices, generally, was to disobey God and eat of that fruit. As a result of that they reaped a whole series of losses. They lost the perfect place to live. They got kicked out of the Garden. They lost the perfect job, which was to dress and keep it. They lost their marital harmony, because they started blaming each other. They lost their relationship with God, because they felt guilty about what they did. And they lost a child, who was killed by their other child. Think about what that series of events would have done to you psychologically – how hard that would have been. So everything bad stemmed from this beginning. That's why we were told that story in Genesis – to understand how it all got the way it is now – to the point when, 4,000 years later, the apostle Paul said, in Romans 7:18:

Romans 7:18 – *For I know that nothing good dwells in me – that is, in my flesh – for I have the desire to do what is right – well, that's good isn't it? – the desire to do what's right – but in his flesh, which is that part that comes from the devil – but not the ability to carry it out.*

If we think about what happened there and we take a good look at that, they were dealing with the losses that they incurred in an ugly way. And that caused bad things to happen and still does to this day.

I quoted another scripture in that presentation about what the devil did when he tried to break Job. What did he do? Well, he inflicted huge losses on him, didn't he? He lost his children, his wife and his health. So he was hoping that Job would curse God as a result of that. And God was hoping that he would not, and that he would build character and develop faith in God.

And there was also a scripture that we quoted. It's in James 4:7 – that was sort of the keynote scripture for this entire series – where he said:

James 4:7 – *Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

So two things – submit to God, resist the devil – those two things. In the first one I asked, “How are we to do this in a way that makes a difference?” And I told you a story about the selfish lady.

She came to my office and she told me a story about her life and how her husband told her that she was selfish and that she needed to come and get some help with it. So she said to me, “I've always been shallow. I've always wanted things, and cars, and clothes, and money. And I've always been very jealous of people that had more than I had. And my husband – when he makes any financial mistakes – I always get all over him. And I want my kids to be the best dressed, our house to be the nicest. He says that I'm really shallow. And I'm afraid that I'm ruining my marriage and ruining my kids – I'm so bad at it.”

So I was sitting listening to that story and I asked her this question, “Well, what have you done about it?” Here's what she told me she'd been doing. She said, “I prayed, I studied my Bible, I fasted, I went to church, and I donated money to the poor, because I thought if I could just learn to be more generous, then I wouldn't be selfish any longer.” And I said, “How long have you been doing that?” She said, “About five years.” I said, “And what's happened?” She said, “Nothing. I'm still just as selfish as ever. Nothing's happened. God hasn't helped me at all.”

And then I ended that sermon by asking people to think about what was missing. What did she miss? Why wasn't God answering her prayers? And why was she still, after five years of concerted effort, still just as shallow and selfish as ever? That's where we ended, and this is where we're going to pick up today.

Why would we have a series of sermons about losses? Well, because we have to learn how to deal with losses in a godly way. Otherwise, they cause problems. How does that work? Well, we go back to that scripture again: *Submit yourselves to God*. God does allow us to have losses, doesn't He? Sometimes tsunamis happen, or earthquakes, or we get sick, or people we love get sick and die. And sometimes He lets the devil do stuff to us, too, just like in Job. So loss has become a part of life and God allows that to happen. And when we have those losses, we have to submit to God in those things. And when the devil is a part of it, *we have to resist him*. That's the premise of this series.

Why would I give this series in this way? What I'm trying to do – and tried to do from the beginning when I started studying to be a counselor – is to reconcile what they know in psychology and what we know in the Bible. I was surprised to find that it's all the same thing, in a way. God tells us to do certain things and those things work. And I couldn't stay in business as a counselor if the things I told people to do didn't work. I would be out of business. So this is what I've come to. We have to learn how to deal with our losses that are inflicted on us in a deeper way.

Do you know what the two major mental health issues are? Do you know what they are? They are depression and anxiety. Right? Depression leads the charge, actually, and there are more anti-depressants prescribed than any other medication in the world. Then not far behind that...not so much anxiety medication, because all of that is habit forming, and people are resistant to taking it, but it would be right up there if they could find one that didn't cause addiction problems.

So what is depression and what is anxiety? Well, depression and anxiety are cousins, actually. Depression is about losses that we have suffered in the past. We lose our job. We lose our house. We lose our mate. We lose our kids. We lose whatever, and we get depressed – or, we can. When we're depressed, it makes everything harder. It makes being Christian really hard. The devil *loves* it when we get depressed.

So how is that related to anxiety? Well, anxiety is the anticipation of losses in the future. So it's the same thing. It's all about loss. Jesus talked a lot about anxiety, didn't He? "Why are you anxious? Why are you worried about what you're going to wear, or what you're going to have to eat. Have faith. Don't worry about anticipated losses. Just worry about today. That's enough." So anxiety is something that makes it harder to have faith. The devil *loves* it when we have anxiety. Jesus tells us, instead of anxiety, we should have faith.

Dealing with losses in a godly way leads to faith, leads away from anxiety, it leads from depression. Now there are people – more so than with depression – who are chronically anxious. And I hope that you don't think that I'm trying to put you down. It's not a sin to be anxious. It is the result of sin – and quite often, it's somebody else's. A lot of times, the things that others do to us make us anticipate losses in the future, because they took things away from us – in our young life, especially.

I meet people all the time who were made anxious by the things that happened to them when they were kids. So that's very hard to get rid of, but it's not impossible. And, as we struggle against it, we develop faith. It's all part of God's plan.

It's possible, but not fun, to have anxiety and faith at the same time. Remember the man – I think he had a demon, didn't he? – Jesus said, "If you'll just believe." And he said, "I believe, but help my unbelief." He had faith and anxiety at the same time.

My premise, so far, says that when Adam and Eve heard what the devil said, and they acted on that, and they suffered losses, and then Paul comes along and says that that

experience caused what he called *the flesh* in people. And then in Galatians 5, and verse 19, he talks about fruits of the flesh.... I'm going to read them to you. There's a reason for it. We'll get to it in a little bit. He said that...

Galatians 5:19 – ...*immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger....* Does anybody ever have that? No, no, no, I never do. Strife? Do we ever have problems getting along with people? Jealousy? ...*rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies....* Those were all things that Paul said were fruits of the flesh. And that was a partial list. He was just talking to the Galatians and the problems they had. There are lots of other ones, like addictions, and lying, and stealing, and all kinds of things beside these.

If my idea is right about how the devil works in us – and I think it is, because I just read it out of the Bible – then we ought to be able to demonstrate that losses cause these things. Right? How does that happen?

Well, we're going to talk next about Bill's theory of human behavior. That's the theory I use in the room here to work with people that have problems. I want you to imagine a target, like you'd shoot an arrow at, or shoot a gun at, with the different rings around the center. And let's think about the little circle right in the middle of the target. That would correspond to what I'm going to call the *core self* – you at base. What is that? Well, that is a person who comes from the womb hard-wired for relationships. It wants to connect to mother and it wants to connect to father. And then all other relationships are based on these early connections. Now this part is *not* theory. It's evidence-based. It's proven. All of us are born to be relational like God is. He made us that way – to be like Him. Your relationship with God and every other relationship is molded by your relationship with your mother and your father – or, if you don't have a father and a mother, someone else, who is your caregiver. And our ability to trust comes out of these two relationships.

I'm going to read you a psalm – Psalm 22:9 and 10. This is a psalm – it's a prophecy – about what Jesus was going to think when He was alive on the earth. And He says to God:

Psalm 22:9-10 – *You are He who took Me from the womb. You made Me trust you at My mother's breasts. On You I was cast from My birth. From My mother's womb, You have been My God.*

Did you know that modern psychology says that all the things that happen to us in early childhood eventually turn toward God? It does. There is a psychologist who is famous for that. So God tells us here that Jesus was subjected to mortal, human life – every aspect of it – and God gave Him a really great mother, who helped Him be a trustful person. So it was easier for Him to trust God the Father because of Mary. That's what the scripture says. When a baby has that kind of an attachment – like Jesus had with Mary, as a baby – how does he feel? Well, he feels love. He feels safe. There is a general feeling of well-being that comes along with that and a positive view of self. “I am loved. Somebody is going to take care of me. Everything is good. It's all good.” And he has a trusting attitude

about life. He doesn't have much anxiety, because he's never had any reason to anticipate losses in the future.

On the other hand, if somebody grows up with *not* that same kind of treatment and care that Mary gave Jesus, there is sort of a loss of feeling love – that he wanted to have – was designed for, but doesn't get. There's a loss of the safety that he needs to survive and a loss of a feeling of well-being that he was created to have – a negative view of self. At Sandestin, Jim O'Brien gave a sermon about this guy that wrote the song, *Born to Lose*. And we sort of feel that way sometimes if we don't have a solid attachment to our parents, because we're hard-wired to have that with them. And the baby also feels a lot of anxiety, because it's not sure if it's going to be taken care of or not – or, in some cases, it's sure that it's *not*. So that's very anxiety-creating.

That's the center of the bull's eye – what's there – the core self. Then the next ring out around the core self, what is that? Well, that's the grief and the loss that babies suffer when they're not taken care of. Nobody can really take care of a baby perfectly, because they don't get "I'll change you, feed you, clothe you, cuddle you after I finish this load of laundry." They don't understand time yet. Have you ever talked to a five-year-old about day-before-yesterday? They don't get it. Their mind isn't ready for that yet. And so an infant certainly wouldn't be ready for it. Babies don't need much. They don't need an allowance, they don't need a car, they don't need money, they don't need an iPod, cell phone, they don't need a college education – you know, an annuity for that yet. They don't need that stuff. All they need is a few simple things. But all the things that a baby cries for are life and death issues to them. If you don't change a baby, it could kill him eventually. If you don't feed them, they'll die. If you don't keep them warm, it could kill them. And they don't have time, so it's got to happen right now, or it's really scary. When these things are not provided – for whatever reason – babies feel insecure.

We talk about why that happens. It's doesn't always have to mean that the parents are abusive. It just means that life is hard sometimes.

I was talking to a man the other day who was born...the first thing that happened to his mother after he was born was her husband left her. So she had to try to fight to take care of her newborn son, and three other boys that were older, with no money. So she was under huge stress. Do you think that made it harder for her to feed, change, clothe, cuddle, attune herself to him? Absolutely it did! So he has this vague sense of being not good enough and is insecure about what is going to happen to him in his life.

But babies, generally, are pretty resilient. You don't have to be a perfect parent. You don't have to spend *all* your time and attention on them. They can survive a little bit of that and still come out in tact, but what if mom is a meth addict, or stressed about finances, or she works too much, or her mind is somewhere else because she's worried about her husband? Or what if the baby is in another room in a crib while mom and dad are throwing things at each other in the other room – and there's domestic violence? Well that circle get much bigger then, doesn't it? The grief and loss that an infant experiences get much bigger. So the baby feels more insecure, and more anxious, and much more sad,

because it's not getting the things that it needs. So, as parents, we become the way that our children experience losses. We become the devil's conduit to create the same kind of losses in our kid that he created in Adam and Eve.

See, his work isn't down through Harry Potter movies and Ouija boards. It's as much through our ignorant, selfishness and anger as it is all the stuff that we like to point at, which conveniently takes the attention off of us and what we're *not* doing.

So there's a sense of loss that surrounds every human being to some degree. And the more losses we suffer, the bigger the circle could be. What's outside of that? What's the next ring in Bill's theory?

When we don't get what we need, what do we do? Most of us get angry, don't we? So that is the next circle. Have you ever seen a baby get upset? Oh yeah. If they don't get what they want when they want it, they get angry. And God talks a lot about this in the Bible.

In Ephesians 4:26, He says:

Ephesians 4:26 – *Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. So it's possible to be angry without sinning. Anger is what happens when we don't get what we want. Don't let the sun go down on it, because it's not good for you. And give no opportunity to the devil.* Everybody gets angry – even God. Anger in humans is an emotion that comes up when we suffer loss. It's what we *do* when we get angry that causes the problem. That's the problem. Ephesians 4:26 and 27.

So what's the next ring outside of that? You've got the core self, a ring of grief and loss – hurt from not being taken care of – all the losses we suffer in life – it continues throughout our life. And then we have a ring of anger, where we get angry because things happen. We hear about people getting angry with God, because somebody died, or they lost their job, or whatever. What's the next ring outside of that, then? Well, let's read about it in Jeremiah 17:9.

Jeremiah 17:9 – *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately – one translation says wicked, but the word can also be translated sick – who can understand it? Why do we have that? Because we want to think of ourselves as good. Nobody likes to think of themselves as an angry person. So, especially, we don't want to think of ourselves as angry with the ones that we want to love and be loved by so much – our parents. And certainly nobody likes to feel sad. Right? So we hide these things from ourselves. And it makes it really hard to get down to what's really causing all the anger and the sadness – to the losses that have occurred to us. We don't like to think about those things. We like to cover them over.*

I'm going to talk a little bit about the kinds of things that we do to hide the truth about our life from ourselves. The first one is technically what is called *repression*. That's where we unconsciously push away the feelings – don't let ourselves see it. *Suppression*

is when we consciously do that – “I’m just deciding I’m not going to think about it, because every time I do, I just want to hit somebody or it makes my stomach hurt or something.” That’s suppression. Repression is when we don’t know we’re doing that.

I had this very nice lady in my office and we’d done a lot of work on her anger about her father. She was telling me several weeks after that about how she wasn’t angry with her father anymore. And she’s one who always feels her anger in her hand. And while she’s talking to me about her father, she’s waving her fists around like this. Now I said, “Look at your hands.” She just dropped them like that. She doesn’t want to go there. She doesn’t want to see how badly her father has hurt her and how angry she still is with him.

Another kind of defense that we throw up is what is called *projection*. Have you ever found yourself disliking somebody and you don’t really know why? Then you find out that they’re just like you. Well, that’s projection. We’re projecting our faults on to other people.

I had a thirteen-year-old tell me once, “I hate that mean girl. She called me a mean girl.” She was afraid she was a mean girl.

Another one is *intellectualization*. Some of us may really be tempted to get into Bill’s theory with its diagram and terminologies – especially when we put it up on the overhead – and then conveniently forget that he’s talking about *us* and *our* losses. People do that. They get into jargon and all that.

But probably – even worse than these things – I’m just going to call this *wall*.

I had a little girl come to my office once – she was about thirteen – and her mother is an alcoholic and her father is mentally ill. He embarrasses her in public and says mean things to her. She’s afraid her mother is going to let her down. She’s been hurt so much by both of those and she doesn’t want to suffer any more losses. She builds a wall between herself and other people. She pointed out to me one day that she couldn’t make eye contact with others. That’s one of the ways that she builds that wall. She makes herself unapproachable so that she can avoid being disappointed by people.

When we’re defenseless little children, these defenses help protect our hearts the only way we have available to us. But as we get older, they start working against us, because they keep us from seeing the problem and doing something about it, which we have the ability to do as we get older. If we never face our losses, we become angry and bitter, depressed and anxious – or worse yet, physically ill, isolated and alone. That’s where unresolved losses lead us – into depression and anxiety, anger and bitterness.

The thing that I was just amazed by... I always thought as you got older – you know, in the church – as you got older, you got better. But left unresolved, those unresolved losses, if we allow our defenses to remain in tact, the older we get, the worse the effects are of those things on us.

How do losses cause us to behave badly? Well, let's go back to the selfish woman. And let's notice the results in her life.

I'm looking down the list here, in my notes, of the things that Paul said were fruits of the flesh – immorality, no; impurity, no; sensuality, no; idolatry, yes – she worshipped *things*, right? – sorcery, no; enmity, no; strife, yes – caused trouble in the family and with friends all her life – jealousy, yes – really jealous about other people who had more stuff than she had – dissensions, not so much, although some; divisions, not so much; envy, yes – craved what other people had; drunkenness, orgies, not so much. But she had – let's see, one, two, three, four, five – six fruits of the flesh that you can easily identify, because of her problem.

So what did she do to overcome those fruits of the flesh? She prayed, she studied, she fasted, she went to church, and she donated to the poor, and nothing happened. So what was it she missed? Well, you notice that these are all things that we do. We pray. We study. And some of us, we pray in kind of a rote way, where we're going to put in time praying. It's sort of an exercise. We're going to study our Bible for 30 minutes every day about this problem. We put in our time. So it becomes an activity, not something in our head. She fasted. She went to church. She donated to the poor.

What was it that she left off the list? Well, here's what Jesus said. Jesus said, when the Pharisees called His disciples into account because they didn't wash their hands before they ate – which they thought was righteousness.... He said:

Matthew 15:18-20 – *What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this defiles a person. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.* These are all fruits of the flesh, aren't they? *These are what defile a person.* That's Matthew 15:18 through 20.

He identifies where the problem is. It's in her heart. And no amount of trying to be good is going to fix that. She has to look into her heart, get past her defenses, acknowledge the anger that she has, and feel the pain of the losses she suffered. And until we do that, she's not going to have any help. She's not going to get any results. As long as we keep our hearts off limits to God and to ourselves, He can't help us.

There's a famous bank robber, Willy Sutton – I don't know if you've ever heard of Willy – but they asked him, "Willy, why did you rob that bank?" And he said, "That's where the money is." Practical guy, right? Well, for us, our *heart* is where the money is when it comes to overcoming.

So, can you integrate that? Can you integrate this scripture – this teaching that Jesus gave – with what you've just learned? What *is* the human heart? Well, it's the target we've been talking about – the core self, surrounded by hurt, then anger, then deceitfulness. The human *heart is desperately wicked and deceitful. Who can know it?*

What happened when she finally started to do the inner work? Well, guess what we discovered. We discovered that, when she was a baby, her mother was very preoccupied with lots of problems that she had. Her husband was going to graduate school and they didn't have any money. What do you know! And she remembers, even, when she got a little older, lying in bed at night, listening to them fight about money. And she remembers being filled with anxiety and feeling a constriction in her chest as she listened to them fight about that. Isn't that the most amazing thing? See, it isn't that she started out as a mean, rotten, little brat. She was made anxious about those things by what her parents did unwittingly. They're very good parents, really. I met her father, actually – really nice guy. He didn't have any clue he was doing that to his daughter. Neither did his wife. But that's what she came away with from the encounters that they had with each other. Her mom being preoccupied, and her dad, they probably didn't attune themselves to her quite as much as they should have, so she had a lot of anxiety, probably, from early on.

But once she learned these things, she opened her heart up to God with tears, and she worked through all of those feelings that she had. The last time she came to my office, she reported that she was not having any rages any longer. It was much easier to be calm. She hadn't been critical with her husband or raised her voice to her kids. She wasn't anxious about the fact that their car wasn't paid off yet, or their house. She was gracious to people in a way she'd never been able to be. And she told me that it was easier for her to trust God than ever before. And while she was telling me this, she started to cry, and she said, "You know, I am so happy. It's like a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders. I'm free! I'm free of this! I've prayed for so long. It's a miracle!"

See, God was there all the time. He wanted to help, but she wasn't going to the right place to do the work. But once she did the inner work, then God was able to help her pass through all of that. If she had remained anxious, like her mother, she would have passed that anxiety on to her kids by the way she treated them. And she'd have continued that chain of anxiety on down to the next generation, just like it had been passed to her, and to her mother, and her grandmother before. But, because she was willing to do the heart work, she broke the chain of family deficits and is now passing trust and faith on to her kids.