

PROGRAM 21 TEASER

I went through Marine Corps bootcamp over half a century ago. In those days the drill instructor could still cuss you out and rough you up. Some young men couldn't take it—and didn't make the cut from mama's boy to marine. Those D.I.'s had a tough job turning civilians into warriors. But they were determined to do it. So is our Savior Jesus. To accept Him as Savior is only step one. Then the Holy Spirit goes to work as God's drill instructor. And that's when we learn that we, too, are called to be soldiers for Christ—warriors, not wimps! So join me. God is offering us a life that's MORE THAN TALK.

PROGRAM 21 INTRO

I can't get over it. I never will. I have met God—He's my heavenly Father—more real than things I see and feel. And if you have accepted Jesus, then the Creator of this universe is also your awesome Father. Now we're in training—preparing for immortality. He loves us with an immeasurable love. He would have to—to die for our sins and rise to set us free to now learn how to love Him. Sure, life is filled with battles that He will teach us how to win. After, all our Jesus is working in our lives through the Holy Spirit to turn us into warriors—not wimps.

PROGRAM 21 PAGE 1

TRAINING WARRIORS—NOT WIMPS!

Page 1 “Help me! Negative thinking is ruining my life!”

Life is not easy. It’s not supposed to be. But when you invite Jesus Christ into your life, you no longer face any battle alone. And you find that with each battle you fight and win, you get stronger, not weaker. That’s because God is turning you into a warrior, not a wimp.

The Bible says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” (in other words, you are what you think). Proverbs 23:7 Note the correlation between heart and mind—the heart is thinking. Picture the atmosphere as literally crackling with thought waves. Some are positive and beautiful, and others are negative and ugly. Visualize two unseen personalities creating and projecting thoughts on the human mind: a wonderful and loving God and a subtle and sinister Satan. Both desire control of your mind. It’s simple. The one who controls your mind controls you. None of us are immune to negative thoughts coming our way. We must learn to think scripturally—tuning out the voice of the devil by tuning in to the Holy Spirit’s frequency.

One young soldier for Christ said, “I just seem to go negative in my thought life so much of the time. Does that happen to you? Do you have any counsel?”

I answered, “For sure I have to battle negative thoughts.” Then I decided to give him an answer—a wrong answer—so he would not forget the right answer. “Just discipline yourself to say ‘I am not going to think on this negative thought!’” Then I quickly added, “If you take that answer, you will never win the war against negative thinking.”

Now we were ready for God’s recipe for a biblical mind-set of positive and godly thoughts.

Interestingly, the Scriptures do not tell us not to think negative thoughts. Just try to concentrate on not thinking that negative thought and you’re still thinking it. Instead, God’s Word tells us to fill our mind with His thoughts. In other words, it is not what we *are not* to think on, but what we *are* to think on.

Philippians 4:8 is such a positive concept—and it works! “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” There it is. The simple way to test your thoughts by using this verse as a guide.

So now my young friend knows what to do. He is daily searching the Scriptures to know what God thinks, what God loves, what God hates. “Lord Jesus, this lustful thought for a girl is not from you. I reject it and focus on You. You said, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ My choice is You, Lord. Wow! You are captivating my mind, Lord Jesus. You are my answer—my freedom—from all tormenting negativity.” Thank you Lord. I’m learning how to be a warrior for You—not a wimp for the devil.”

PROGRAM 21 PAGE 2

TRAINING WARRIORS—NOT WIMPS!

Page 2 “I don’t feel love for God! What’s wrong?”

Now let’s see how God teaches us not to let our feelings rule our lives. Some people open their hearts to Jesus Christ and begin a new Christian life with little or no emotional high. Others are born again and the heavens open. I was the latter. The Bible exploded as a living Book. I saw Jesus in the sunsets and cloud formations. Felt Him in the wind. Stood awestruck on starry nights. Knew I heard Him say “I love you!” in the flash of lightning and boom of thunder.

I thought I could pray forever. And cry tears of adoration forever as I told Jesus “I love You! I love you!” a thousand times over. But one day I awoke to panic. I didn’t feel love for God. In fact, I didn’t feel like God was even around. And my emotional high—my feeling of love for God—fell from the skies and sank to the bottom of the sea.

Maybe you are there right now. Or perhaps you soon will experience a time when you just don’t feel love for God. Then will you go by your feelings? Will you believe the lie of the evil one that God has abandoned you or just doesn’t care? Or will you recognize that your all-wise Heavenly Father wants to mature you and take you to a new spiritual level?

“What is love?”, you ask. Well, God is love (1 John 4:16) and He lives in you if you have asked His Son to forgive and save you. “But how can I know I love God when I don’t feel it?” Love is more than an emotion triggered by your intellect. Love is an act of the will—yes, an action in response to Jesus’ call for obedience.

John 14:21 revolutionized my life on how I am to measure my love for Christ. It puts “feelings” where they belong—as the last car on the train and not the engine. Let’s break it down so we can see how Jesus measures our love for Him. “He that has my commandments (My words) and keeps them (guards and obeys them), he it is that loves Me...” Stop! Did you get that? I heard the Lord saying, “You trusted Me to save you. Now trust Me to lead you. Here’s how to know you love Me: study My Word—the Bible—the Scriptures—all of it. Ask the Holy Spirit for the power to obey My commands. Your obedience proves your love for Me—not feelings that come and go.”

Now the door was opened for the rest of the verse to come true: "...he that loves Me (Jesus) shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will make Myself known to him." So now you and I look to Him in confidence. We study and obey the Scriptures. We ask the Holy Spirit to fill and control us. Much of the time "we walk by faith, not by sight" with no great emotional highs. Other times, as we worship Him through praise music that exalts God, tears may flow freely and we will experience the emotional wonder of His presence.

Either way, He is always with you—in you—for you. So just now, look up and say, "I love you, Lord Jesus. And by Your grace I shall love You moment by moment through obedience to all You command."

TRAINING WARRIORS—NOT WIMPS!

Page 3 It hurts to say goodbye

Now comes one of life's most difficult lessons in God's school for spiritual warriors—losing what we love the most.

Her heart was broken and so was mine. Frisco was dying with all the suffering that goes with it. I could almost feel my daughter's tears over the phone. She had found a discarded puppy over 14 years ago. Lovable Frisco, a lab mix, became part of the family. Now it was time to say goodbye. And it's tough to say goodbye when an appointment with death can't be broken—whether a person or even a loyal family pet.

Daughter and granddaughter needed me there. Dawn cradled old Frisco's large, lovable head as the injection was given. Then his heart stopped beating and he was gone. I left my ladies in the room so they could cry. And I, myself, wept like a child. It hurts to love. And it's hard to say goodbye.

Death! Not a nice word. I know that God doesn't like it. It all started when our first parents threw God's warning back into His face. They opened the door to death and we haven't been able to get it to leave. If God had said, "Sinful humans, you're on your own. Goodbye and get lost!", it would be better not to be born. No purpose? No hope? Just death? And a grave?

But God *didn't* leave it there. He calls death an "enemy" that He is going to destroy. And He is going to open every grave and take back their contents (1 Corinthians 15:55). And our hero—Jesus? He came to taste—experience death for every individual" (Hebrews 2:9). And God proved we could count on Him by raising a dead Savior back to life. Just like He's going to do with you.

You see, your Creator hates four things that you and I wish we could outrun—and can't. But once we keep our own appointments with death (or, for the final generation, His return), those four "uglies" will never touch you and me again. "And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Farewell death! You too, sorrow, crying and pain! FOREVER!

So it's ok to cry when we face the death of a loved person—or a treasured pet like Frisco. Jesus did! Death is ugly. It's tough to say goodbye. But “life forevermore” is not a tease—it's our Father's guarantee for those who welcome His Son. For believers, it's a theological certainty.

And maybe our favorite pets? I'm too old to have all the answers like “There are no animals in God's Kingdom.” Perhaps that's true. Perhaps not. Romans 8:19-23 excites me. All of creation groaning to be set free from their bondage to decay—with a hope? Enough said. Study it yourself. Just don't write me and call me a heretic for my suggesting there may be surprises in heaven. After all, Christ is not returning seated on a lightning bolt. Or in a Lexus. He's on a horse. A horse!

Keep telling other people about Jesus so they can be ready for that unbreakable appointment with death. We have “forever” waiting for us. And who knows the joys and surprises that we shall find?!

TRAINING WARRIORS—NOT WIMPS!

Page 4 God's ladder to a higher spiritual experience

I remember when Jesus came into my heart and life. This lonely Marine wanted out of this world. Out of this world and up to heaven. I figured now that I knew Christ and was spiritually born again, heaven was my next step. Instead, I learned that school was my next step—God's school of hard knocks that result in God using you and me right here on planet earth.

Study 2 Peter chapter one closely (his last two chapters also). When a great man of God is about to die, his final instructions can be priceless. And so it is with Peter. In his first epistle, he introduced himself as "'an apostle" to babes in Christ (1 Peter 2:2).

Time flies, and now a more mature Peter introduces himself first as "a servant" and then an apostle as he sends another letter—this one urging babes in Christ to mature into faithful saints and soldiers. "Ah", I thought. "So that's what God is after: I have to grow from a wimpy little baby into a warrior that He can use to give life to others."

That's when I discovered God's ladder to spiritual growth and deeper, real experiences with the Son of God. We have, Peter writes, been given "great and precious promises" and a Savior who now lives within us and sets us free from every lust that eats like cancer in those without Christ (verses 3 and 4).

But we are to play our part. God gives us faith to believe—and that faith becomes our solid base or foundation. Now we are to climb the ladder—one step at a time (it's all contained in only three verses, 7-9). But it's loaded with meaning and possibility.

First, "add to your faith virtue"—purity, character that becomes more and more like Jesus. Then add to virtue "knowledge"—daily searching the Scriptures in order to know God's will and plan for your life. Next we add another step in the ladder called "temperance" or self-control. We learn to say "Yes" to what God loves and "No" to what He hates.

One more step up the ladder takes us to “patience”—where we learn to walk with Jesus moment by moment and endure tests, trials, tears and temptations without getting discouraged and giving up. Then we add to patience “godliness”—a deep cry for “God-like-ness”—where we see such a holy and perfect God more clearly and submit our thoughts, words and actions to Him for a deeper sanctifying and separation from the filth of the world.

Now, way up the ladder comes “brotherly kindness”. It is often easier to love the “lost” than the “saved”. But when we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit’s gift of kindness and gentleness, we will love our brothers and sisters, not provoke them or gossip about them. We will live to serve them, rather than wait for them to serve us.

Finally comes the step in our spiritual ladder that leads to a greater awareness of God’s incredible presence. From brotherly kindness, we now climb to the top step, agape love. This love is so powerful, so unconditional, that it is the very essence of the Father’s description of Himself—“God is love”. With this love manifested in all our relationships with God and others, we are more than conquerors. Without it we remain babes at best and defeated at worst.

Peter, who is soon to die (see verses 13-15), assures us that if we climb this ladder of God’s priorities we will live fruitful lives and receive an abundant entrance into heaven. How does your life line up with this ladder? Now is the time to take inventory and dedicate yourself to the climb. Nothing is more important.

TRAINING WARRIORS—NOT WIMPS!

Page 5 Your highest purpose in life

It's too astounding to even imagine. Yet it's true. The incredible Power—God Himself—has created beings in His image and likeness and called them to know, love and worship Him. And you and I are two of those called to begin learning how to worship Him while on earth so we can do it forever in heaven and the new earth.

And to think—He is actually seeking you out to take part in this most awesome privilege. Jesus Himself said so!" John 4:23, 24 "But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Wow! You're in on this. God loves you more than anyone could love you. And now He's calling you to love Him more than anyone in this world.

What is "worship"? My simple definition is "the speech and actions of a lover who cannot contain the adoration that he/she holds for the One whose love and intimate presence are beyond compare."

A past saint, William Temple, described worship like this: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination with the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God. All this is gathered up in that emotion which most cleanses us from selfishness because it is the most selfless of all emotions—adoration."

Some Christians find it hard to get started in offering our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus worship. I offer a suggestion, fellow warrior. Start with the words of worship found in the Book of Revelation. Since these words come from heaven, they are simple, lovely, awesome and pure. I found ten statements that, along with my own "love words", I offer over and over to our precious Lord. Start with these ten and the Spirit will take you further.

WORSHIP HIM!

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”
(Revelation 4:8)

WORSHIP HIM!

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created.” (4:11)

WORSHIP HIM!

“You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation.” (5:9)

WORSHIP HIM!

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” (5:12)

WORSHIP HIM!

“Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.” (5:13)

WORSHIP HIM!

“Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever. Amen” (7:12)

WORSHIP HIM!

“We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who is, and was, and is to come because You have taken to Yourself Your great power, and have reigned.” (11:17)

WORSHIP HIM!

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, O King of saints. Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? for You only are holy...” (15:3,4)

WORSHIP HIM!

“Hallelujah: Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God.”
(19:1)

WORSHIP HIM!

“Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigns.” (19:6)

Do it often. Give your praise and worship from your heart to your Lord. The Holy Spirit will guide you on your road of intimacy with God. And remember, while we usually think of “worship” as words spoken or sung to the Lord, it is so much more. Like a moment of silent adoration. Or an act of love offered in His name. Or a heart melted and rendered speechless at the foot of His cross.

Just tell your heavenly Father that you want to learn how to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Then open your mouth and He will begin to fill it. You’re well on the road to Jesus turning you into a warrior—not a wimp!