

The Spirit is about to make a very distinct shift in His instruction. Having laid a foundation for our spiritual identity, He will now address what it practically looks like to live as one whose identity is found in Jesus and not in this world. The Spirit will take us through different relational scenarios we will encounter as we carry out our assignments in this world and His focus will be on submission and suffering. These are two words that naturally grate against our soul; but is so important when it comes to practically living as an alien and stranger in this world.

You see, we can have a bold confidence regardless of our circumstances because of who we are and to whom we belong. In fact, knowing that all things are prescribed by our Lord gives us the mental, spiritual and emotional advantage enabling us to always care for others above ourselves, which is at the heart of submission especially through times of unfair suffering. This lifestyle is so radical, extreme, and against everything that we would otherwise think and feel so the Spirit first prepares us with a small exhortation; and in so doing He goes for the jugular: our feelings.

1 Peter 2:11

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

The Spirit begins by reminding us once again who we are, “*agapetoi*”—“Beloved”—which is a variant of God’s divine “agape” love. This is not just a

passing comment, but it is a serious reminder that of all those who live in this world we are the people of God's divine love. Think about it; that is quite a badge of honor to wear. You are the Lord's loved one, the object of His great mercy, and it is critical that you know this to be true for it is the only way you are going to have the confidence and conviction to abstain from fleshly lusts. This truth, that we are beloved, is the reason, the power, and the means by which we can make the choice to abstain.

Even though Peter is writing this letter, we have to keep in mind this is a direct exhortation from the Spirit of God. Thus, He says "I urge you" utilizing the Greek word "*parakleo*" which means I call you near as one who consoles. This comes from the same root of the word Jesus used when He told His disciples He was sending them another helper ("*parakletos*") who was just like Him (**John 14:16**). Jesus was of course referring to the Holy Spirit who would comfort us and instruct us in all truth. Accordingly, the Spirit of God, our comforter and counselor, is tenderly and affectionately calling out for us—the ones who are chosen and so loved by the Father—to come near to Him for wise instruction.

In this comforting address, I believe the Spirit intends to evoke our emotions—to touch us deeply in our desires for affection, care, and consideration. He does this because the instruction He gives us is ultimately about how we are to align our emotions with the truth of our identity so we will not be carried away by all the lies and misinformation provided by the lusts of our flesh. So He starts with the truth: we are aliens and strangers or resident foreigners. We may have our Green Card to live in and work in this world, but we are not citizens; we do not belong. The truth is we belong to the kingdom of God, we are His sons and

daughters, and we need to always own our identity and never confuse our work in this world with having a place in this world.

As the Lord's beloved, we are to choose to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Now, "abstain" is in the *present* tense and *middle* voice. This means that every moment of your now, you are to dig deep down inside your being and make the choice to live like an alien and stranger and resist doing what your flesh wants you to do. I want you to understand this instruction is about truth, feelings, and choices. The truth is your plumb line, your feelings need to be reined in and aligned with the truth, and then your choices, in every moment of your now, will be befitting of one who is beloved by God.

The use of the *present* tense and *middle* voice is critical to understanding this passage; it places the responsibility for this war squarely in our hands. There is no room in this passage for the victim mentality. If you are living as a captive, as a prisoner of war to all your feelings, it is because you have made that choice. No one is forcing you or involuntarily enslaving you: the buck stops with you. **Romans 8:12-14** makes that clear. I know you don't like to hear that this is your responsibility and I know that with every fiber of your being you want to be able to blame someone (especially God) for your emotional state, but that is simply not Biblical. You are not a victim; you have been set free. The victim mentality is a construct created by those whose abode is in this world to make sense of their lives and to appease their guilty conscience. It is the only way they can hold onto their goodness ethic. But as a child of God you have no excuse, not even a semblance of one. You are free to choose, and this is a very powerful truth.

Thus, if you choose to live like one who belongs to this world, as a captive, a

prisoner, a slave, then it is because you have surrendered to the enemy in this war. You have waved your white flag and said, “here, take me, I am yours.” And your enemy has done only what you have, in your freedom, permitted him and invited him to do. Do you remember, **2 Peter 1:3**? His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness—everything! Therefore, the cause for the fight and the power to win this fight is all within our being. Thus, if you are walking around defeated, crushed, weak and feeble, able to be tossed to and fro at the shift of the circumstances in your life, then you—yes you—have raised your white flag of surrender. As such, the Spirit is calling for you to dig in deep, get control of your emotions, embrace your true identity, and make the choice to abstain from the fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. This is something you can do. I know it does not feel that way; but it is the truth.

Now let us dive into this phrase: fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Clearly we are dealing with a deadly enemy since the Spirit puts it all in the context of war; and there are always serious and cataclysmic consequences to war: some die, some are injured, and still others live and prosper. I am going to approach this from the back and work my way forward as I think it will be easier to understand our enemy. First, I am going to discuss the object of the war, which is our soul; second, the activity of the fleshly lusts, which is to wage war; and, third, the identity of the fleshly lusts.

The war is against our soul. The soul is that unique part of our being that makes me, well me and you distinctively you. It is the eternal part of our existence that houses our identity, our personhood, or our spirit; and the soul is the seat of our mind and emotions. It is the part of us which Jesus fell in love with and has

stamped with His blood. Our soul is what will live forever, which explains why we will know each other throughout eternity for our soul has intelligence, memory, and it makes deep and life-long attachments.

Our soul is constantly being assailed. Contextually, that is why the Spirit has spent so much time talking about our true identity. He has been equipping us with weapons of truth to both defend and attack in this epic battle for domination of our personhood. Mark my word, we are in a war and as long as we are in these bodies of flesh, this fight ensues. Keep in mind, if two people are fighting out in the street, we don't call it a war. It is a street fight. If two gangs are busting it out in the fields, we don't usually call it a war. It is a territory tiff amongst rival gangs. But if two armies are posed to come against one another in what is expected to be a prolonged engagement, we call it a war. War is big, massive, and it has many players, many casualties, and the spoils of war are usually more than significant.

All of us know what it is like to be dominated in this war. We have chased our identity and significance our entire lives. However, because we have not understood this war or how to fight, we have been left feeling tired, depressed, confused, worn out, hopeless, emasculated, feeble, weak, frustrated, angry, lustful, needing and wanting more, and at the same time completely fearful and worried that we will never get what we need. As such, we have been dominated.

Now, people go to war for all sorts of crazy reasons, but this is a very unique war as it is for domination, oppression, subjugation, and enslavement. It is about power, control, and absolute supremacy. On the one side of the battle lines is the identity which the Lord has given us accompanied by all of His wonderful promises of peace, rest, joy, abundance, life, power, intimacy, love, and self-

control. And on the other side is the identity which the world has given to us empowered by fleshly lusts aimed at stealing away our peace, rest, joy, abundance, life, power, intimacy, love, and self-control, leaving us enslaved to the ups and downs of our emotions which change moment by moment based on what “life” throws our way.

These are the players in this epic war for our soul. The question is who is going to win on any given day. The ability to win is without question within our grasp, which is why we can abstain from the fleshly lusts. However, the decision to win and to conquer and to dominate in this war is something that still must come from deep within our being. We must therefore understand our enemy, understand how he has ruled our lives, and how we can turn the tables on this monster.

Our enemies, these fleshly lusts, are purposeful, intentional, and very active. Their very purpose is to wage war against your personhood, your identity. They want to tear it all away from the spiritual and keep it subjugated to the physical and to the demands of those whose abode is in this world. War is in the *present middle indicative*. Thus, it is happening every moment of your now (*present tense*), it is a statement of fact (*indicative mood*) that cannot and must not be ignored or else you will be crushed under the power of this enemy, and this war is carried out deep within your being (*middle voice*).

This means you can never let down your guard or like opportunistic warriors, this enemy will attack. You are always at war and must always be ready. That is why the Spirit instructed us in **1:13** to prepare our minds for action—or to always be in a state of preparation for war and never be caught off guard. It is to be how

we live: prepared for action is to describe our lives from beginning to end. We studied how important it is to gird up the loins of our mind with the truth for it is the only way to defend the onslaught of the enemy. The truth is also our weapon of offense to destroy every loft and arrogant thought which raises itself against the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. We must know the truth; we must choose to believe the truth; and we must **always** bet our lives upon the truth because this war is constant and the consequences of being unprepared are devastating.

I have noticed an interesting phenomenon in our body that often leaves us unprepared. It seems we are always engaged in some skirmish with the enemy both individually and as a body. And what happens is that God shines His spotlight of truth on the darkness in some area of our lives, and we come across a big enemy that was hiding and dug deep into the cracks and crevices of our soul. And although he was unseen, this enemy had definitely been doing his work of secretly undermining our personhood and challenging our spiritual identity. We have just been unaware of its efforts focused on other fights or recovering from prior fights. But suddenly he steps out of his place of hiding and is in our face screaming and yelling and ready for battle. We marshal our troops and go to war; and, with the support of those around us, we enjoy a victory. Suddenly on the other side of this battle, God is so good, amazing, and so powerful. We did it; we won! And it is a time to celebrate. It seems that we stand taller, have bigger muscles, and are full of the Lord's confidence. And during this time the other enemies in our soul seem to retreat to their caves and declare a temporary peace from this war; after all, it was a brutal war and everyone is exhausted.

And what tends to happen is that we let down our guard, we do not remain

prepared in an active state of war readiness and suddenly the enemy emerges from their caves, cracks, and crevices and it is an onslaught, an ambush, a blitzkrieg; and suddenly we are overwhelmed. They know we are not ready, they know we are tired, they know we are relishing in our victory as if we have fought our last and final war, and they come against us with a fury intending to demoralize and crush us.

A while back I received a word from the Lord and it was ***Tet Offensive***. I mentioned it before and I think the Lord has finally given me understanding. Historically, the Tet Offensive was a military campaign during the Vietnam War that was launched by the enemy forces of the Viet Cong and North Vietnam against South Vietnam, the United States, and their allies. It was a campaign of surprise attacks that were launched against military and civilian command and control centers throughout South Vietnam, during a period when no attacks were supposed to take place. The operations are referred to as the Tet Offensive because there was a prior agreement to "cease fire" during the Tet Lunar New Year celebrations. Both North and South Vietnam announced on national radio broadcasts that there would be a two-day cease-fire during the holiday. Nonetheless, the Communists launched a surprise attack that began during the early morning hours of the first day of Tet.

The initial attacks stunned the US and South Vietnamese armies and took them by surprise, but most were quickly contained and beaten back, inflicting massive casualties on communist forces. Although the offensive was a military defeat for the communists, it had a profound effect on the US government and shocked the US public, which had been led to believe by its political and military leaders that

the communists were incapable of launching such a massive effort. The attack served its purposes; the American people were demoralized and this amplified the wave of unrest and discontent with the war efforts. It is as if we, as a nation, were emotionally defeated so no matter how much fight we threw at the war we were destined to defeat.

And this is how the fleshly lusts within our soul work. When you think there is peace and you let down your guard, even for a moment in time, suddenly they come out in a full on assault and you are thrown back, let down, demoralized, and emotionally defeated such that no matter how much fight you can muster up and throw at the war, you seem destined to defeat. And in this demoralized state, these enemies ravage you and take full advantage of the opportunity tempting you to give up and give yourself to the world and to all your fleshly coping mechanisms of control used for surviving this life.

We must know the deceitful, cunning, and devious strategy of the enemy and always be in a state of preparation for war and never be caught off guard. It is to be how we live: prepared for action is to describe our lives from beginning to end regardless of the circumstances. The enemy is a liar and loves sneak attacks; thus, we must never find ourselves unprepared or our identity, our personhood, will be violently assailed.

So what are these fleshly lusts which wage war against our soul? Well "lusts" is a noun and it speaks of desires, longings, cravings, and wants. Fleshly comes from the Greek word, "*sarx*" and is an adjective which speaks of the source of these lusts. The flesh "*sarx*" is always pitted against the Spirit "*pneuma*" and is literally our mortal enemy. The word "*sarx*" occurs 147 times in the New Testament and is

one of the most frequently repeated words. It is used in reference to the human body as well as to the whole person. But specifically, Paul uses this word as a metaphor to drive home the spiritual separation and distinction between that which comes from the Spirit and that which comes from self, with the implication that what comes from the Spirit is good (since only God is good) and that which comes from self is downright evil and stands in opposition to all that is good. In some translations, “*sarx*” is rendered as flesh, the heart, our *Old Man*, our *Old Sinful Nature*, and the carnal mind,

This is our enemy. ***Galatians 5:17*** says that the flesh sets its mind, its heart, or all of its efforts against the Spirit. Likewise, the Spirit is in complete and total opposition to the flesh. These two are contrary to one another, always in conflict, always antagonistic, and our choices are never free from this fight.

So what are these lusts? Well, if the flesh is in complete and total opposition to the Spirit, let’s go back to ***1:1*** and start by understanding what the Spirit has communicated about our identity—our personhood—and how we are to live in it and compare it to the messages with which the flesh attacks us. Keep in mind, the lusts of the flesh are all about indulgence in thoughts, emotions, ideas, and wrong beliefs which keep us spinning, confused, impoverished, dominated, and works against our accepting by faith all that God has spoken over our lives.

- The Spirit says I reside as an alien: my abode is not this world. I have been sent here by God on a mission to proclaim His excellencies.
 - Well that is nice in theory, but practically I have to day-in-and-day-out trudge through all the expectations and burdens placed on my life and that is just reality. That is why I want to live, explore, have

fun, love and be loved. I want to see things, know things, and be known. Besides, I need to achieve and be productive and make my mark in this world, one way or the other, otherwise I will not be accepted, loved, wanted, needed or cared for. I will be left, abandoned, neglected, ignored, marginalized, and forgotten as one who is worthless. Everyone knows the rules of this game and to make it through you have to play.

- The Spirit says I have been chosen by God and sanctified by the Spirit to obey Jesus and be sprinkled with (or stamped in) His blood.
 - I don't feel chosen, nothing is really all that special about me. Other people get the fame, the job, the woman, the friends, the money, the nice clothes, the talent, the humor, the smarts, and so on. Others get God's blessings in this life, but I am still waiting for mine. Maybe I have to do things better; who knows. Besides, being chosen by God is nice and all, but practically I want to be chosen by those who make me feel more important. I want others to choose me and make me feel special and adored. And with regard to obedience; well I have never been great at following the rules. It all seems so controlling and stifling. I just want to live a normal life.
- The Spirit says I have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to obtain an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, will not wade away and which is reserved in heaven for me since I am protected by the power of God for a salvation to be revealed in the last days.

- Yeah, I get it, but I just don't feel it. I know that on the day of salvation I will get my place in heaven—at least I hope I do. I am crossing my fingers; but it all seems so intangible. I like the fact that I am protected by God, I just wish He would do a better job of protecting me. There is so much that has happened that I don't like. Where was He then? Maybe He is only kind of protecting me when I do things right but when I do things wrong He lets me suffer the consequences.
- The Spirit says that I rejoice over the fact that if necessary I have been distressed by various trials so that the proof of my faith being more precious than gold, even though tested by fire, will result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
 - Rejoice? Right! Are you kidding. I hate going through painful and distressing trials. Why does it always have to be pain? I'm not rejoicing; in fact, I am dreading what He might do to me next. Besides it all seems so mean and unloving and not like one who is "chosen" by the Father. What Father would make their son go through such horror? I get it; it is all about faith. But He should just make me believe because everything in my body does not want to believe; especially if more pain is all I have to look forward to. Getting honor and glory when I die is great but it does not provide me the motivation for my now. Besides, has it all really been necessary? I don't even understand half of what He has done or allowed to be done to me. Ugh!

- The Spirit says that even though I have not seen Him I love Him and though I do not see Him now I believe in Him and greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of my faith the salvation of my soul.
 - Wait a minute, I thought I was saved. Is salvation the outcome of my doing it right? What if I do it wrong? I do love Him—of course I do; but I want to see Him or at least I want to hear Him for myself. Why does He not make Himself more tangible to me like He does to others? It is not fair. How am I supposed to believe if He keeps Himself at such a distance? As far as greatly rejoicing with joy inexpressible, I have no idea what the Spirit is talking about. Joy? I have contempt, anger, bitterness, complaint, and disappointment; all which seems to easily flow from my body, but joy does not seem to be on the list. The “joy of the Lord” seems to be idyllic and something you are to either fake when you go to church or have to wait until you die to experience.
- The Spirit says that the prophets of old served me, and they knew it. They gave up all and sacrificed their lives for me in order to bring me this message about Christ. The message which the Spirit ensured that others would preach to me, the message which angles long to look into or understand.
 - That is really cool and all; but it kind of honestly does not mean that much to me. I’m sorry, I don’t want to offend you; I’m just being honest. I can’t relate.

- The Spirit tells me to prepare my mind for action, keep sober in spirit, and fix my hope completely on the grace to be brought to me at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
 - I have tried this so many times and I just keep failing. How can I do this when I have to deal with so much stress at work and school? And then there is home, family, money, bills, expectations of others, and so on. This is what I have to fix my mind on or else everyone is mad and everything is a mess. I don't have the time to be walking around fixing my mind on some unseen enemy. I will just deal with it when it happens. And I know I am not supposed to hope for anything in this world; but honestly, I'm tired of waiting for blessing. I just want some fun, pleasure, rest, and adventure.
- The Spirit says that as an obedient child, I am not to be conformed to the former lusts which were mine in my ignorance, but like the Holy One who called me I must also be holy in all my behavior because it is written: "you shall be holy, for I am holy."
 - Ok if I am an obedient child, then why can't I be obedient for very long. Can't you just make me holy for real and make this statement true? The "former" lusts are honestly not very former; I fail all the time. In fact, I fail so much I feel like giving in and giving up. I keep coming back because I know it is all true; but all this failure makes me feel so alone, inept, weak and unholy. These "former" lusts still haunt me day-in-and-day-out. I understand He is holy and I want that. I want to be holy; I really do. But as much

as I want this ideal, it seems so much easier to grab validation through the people that I want to approve of me, to prove that I am worthy of being loved, to find my purpose and meaning in the achievements and victories of this life, and to find my provision, protection, love, friendship, comfort, in all that I can control. It is too painful to go through life without getting what I know I need; and it is far too hard to wait for God to do what He says He will do for me. After all, I have been waiting a very long time. These “former lusts” have defined me and to a large part still define my stupid life in this world. I want it to change; God change me. Why won’t you change me? Ugh!

- The Spirit says that if I address as Father the One who impartially judges me according to my work, then I must conduct myself in fear during the time of my stay on earth; knowing that I was not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from my futile way of life inherited from my forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.
 - Fear; now that is something I know very well and with which I have a lot of experience. I am afraid of each of you. I am afraid of God and I don’t really trust that He will change me, make me joyful, or bless me. I am afraid of more pain. I am afraid of everyone. I am afraid of what I am capable of doing. But mostly I am afraid I won’t get what I want. I am afraid of being alone, being a failure, being neglected, being unwanted. I am afraid of so many things. And if I

am honest and look at my “work” for which I will be judged, I have every reason to be afraid—scared to death! I know what Jesus did for me. He gave up His life and I feel bad that I can’t do for Him what He wants. I keep hearing He redeemed me, but this so called “futile” life I inherited, all my generational sin, and all my own sin that I added on top of it all, is still my reality. I hate what was handed down to me and I don’t want to be held accountable for other people’s sin. I want it off of me. But I also know that the only way to be free and experience my redemption is through the pathway of fire; and I have been there and done that and I don’t like it. I think I will keep hoping God will just change me.

- That Spirit says that I have purified my soul in order to love others and that I must fervently love my brothers and sisters in Christ from the heart because I have been born again of the seed of God.
 - Well let’s just be honest here; you have given me so many reasons to protect myself. You have hurt me and disappointed me so many times that I can only kind of love you. After all, there is wisdom in having healthy boundaries and protection. Besides, if I love you there is no guarantee that my love is going to be reciprocated. No thank you. And what about me. I want you to prove to me that it is safe to love you. Actually, I am not sure I want that because if you do prove it to me then it means I have to lower my own self-protection and let you in and that is the scariest thing I can imagine. I would be so vulnerable and such an easy target. No

thank you. I have been shut down for a very good reason.

- The Spirit tells me to put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.
 - I get it; these are all bad; but they have been my weapons of warfare and have kept me safe. If you do me wrong, you know I will do you wrong. This kind of mutual threat works wonders in terms of keeping the balance. Besides, I don't want you to know what I really think, feel, or struggle with; and I sure don't want you to know my doubts, fears, and obsessions. If you do, I am afraid you will think so much less of me. That is why I am content covering everything up with my spirituality, my Bible knowledge, my "Pathwayisms," and that is why I will be found busy meeting people, going through the teachings, all to keep you guessing. Besides, when I do speak the truth it always comes back to haunt me; people do not really want the truth. Believe me it is so much easier to cloud the truth or avoid it all together.
- The Spirit tells me to long for the pure milk of the word, just like a new born, so that by it I may grow in respect to salvation since I have tasted the kindness of the Lord.
 - I know I need to read my Bible, I know it will help me; but I don't want to do it and I can't make myself want it. I am sorry. Maybe you have the magic and you just love your time with Jesus, but for me it is painful, boring, and I feel like I am just doing it because I have to. Yes, I have tasted of the kindness of the Lord and I have

had my times where the Bible is amazing and charges me up; but most of the time I just want to get some extra sleep. I have too much to do and I need my sleep. I want to grow up but God is going to have to do something to give me this desire because it is simply not there; and telling me to desire it is not going to help.

- The Spirit says that He is my living stone and I am to come to Him for I am also a living stone being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
 - When I hear this I am just paralyzed in fear. I know what coming to Him means, and I don't like the pain. I have stuffed the past for a reason; and He wants me to now feel all the pain and horror. I am sorry, that is asking too much. After all, I don't feel like a holy priest, I don't feel like offering up sacrifices, I don't feel like I am part of a spiritual household. You may be and I see it has worked for you, but it has never worked for me.
- The Spirit says that in Zion the Father laid a choice stone, a precious corner stone and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed or put to shame.
 - I wish this were true. If we could just build this spiritual house on the rock without having to first fall on the rock, then I would agree. But if I fall on this stone, then all my stuff will be exposed to everyone in this body and I will not just be embarrassed, I will be downright ashamed. I know what lurks within in me, I know what I

have hidden and kept from you, I know what horrific things I think and do and I am so ashamed. I want you to believe that is not who I am, those were moments of weakness. I am really that nice wonderful person you know and love. There is nothing I want more than for you to accept my hypocrisy, deceit, and lies because that is so much better than the truth. I want you to be proud of me because I am really amazing and better than so many others. I am worthy of your love; I can prove it. I just could not handle life if I disgusted you and you turned on me.

- The Spirit told me that for those who don't believe, this stone will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they are appointed.
 - So you are telling me that I have no choice but to fall on the rock otherwise I am disobedient to the word and might be like those who are appointed to this doom where I am offended by the things Jesus says and I stumble over His requirements. I don't think so; there is another way. I don't have to live out everything you say; that is far too radical; I believe enough. I know I am going to heaven; I am ok. I will just hide here and get through this life. I don't have to stumble over what you say, I can just kind of ignore it; besides, I have a big crowd of people who do the same thing and they seem to be ok and succeeding and prospering in this life. They are living the "normal" life and seem to be getting along just fine; and that is kind of what I want as well.

- The Spirit says to me that I am part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own possession, that I may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called me out of darkness into His marvelous light; for I once was a nobody, but now I am someone; I had not receive mercy but now I have received mercy.
 - That is all pretty heady and cool. Maybe I will write a paper on it one day. But I don't really feel it. I can't even practically relate to what this says. It is too high up there and does not meet me here where I need to be met. I am so thankful for the mercy, I definitely know you have been merciful to me even though honestly I still think you have punished me for my sin for too much. Maybe if you gave me more mercy and did not make me go through those distressing trials, it would be easier to believe I am some prince, some priest, and part of something really cool. But life pretty much blows and I don't even know what you want me to do most of the time; I don't feel like you talk to me and I am always confused. If I am all those wonderful things, why not make it easier for me to live like it? Why not prove it to me instead of just say it.

This type of discourse, reasoning, and emoting is all the lusts of the flesh which constantly yearn for something other than what God has chosen for your life. It is these kinds of thoughts and feelings that wage war against us constantly and are in complete opposition to the Spirit. These lusts twist the truth, distort every understanding, and defy the Lord. This is our enemy and this is our fight. We must not be surprised by their offensive attack; dismayed at their cunning; or be caught

off guard. These are the thoughts and the emotions from which we can and must abstain otherwise they will crush, demoralize, haunt, immobilize, and even kill us.

We win this war by our willingness to believe the truth regardless of what we feel. We are the Lord's beloved and that truth is the reason, it is the power, and it is means by which we can make the choice to abstain from fleshly lusts. God's love empowers our faith and when we really soak it in, His love will enable us to align our emotions with the truth of our identity in Him so we will not be carried away by our emotions.

And the spoils of war are real. When we are dominated by these fleshly lusts we have no peace, no rest, no strength, no conviction, and no power. It is a miserable existence. But when we stand in faith, betting our lives on the truth regardless of how we feel, we will find all of these things and more.

This is a fight for our personhood, our very identity. What Jesus has said about us is true not because we feel like it is true, but because He is true and He does not lie. On any given day we may feel these truths with such conviction and certainty that we are unstoppable. And on any other given day we may feel nothing, or feel like none of it is true. But we must become those people that do not make decisions based on these fleeting feelings. We must dig down deep into our soul and refrain from indulging in all those fleshly lusts. It is a matter of truth, believing and choice; not a matter of feelings. And this is a fight the Lord expects us to win. But our victory starts in our identity: believing the truth that we are the Lord's beloved and everything He said about you and me is the truth all the time.

Let's Pray