

## **“The Cycle of Life”**

Psalm 81

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Recently, I received a phone call from a friend who needs help. He is trying to kick a prescription drug habit and is struggling. He knew it would be tough, but not this bad. He was asking for prayer and encouragement.

I assured him of my prayers and then I shared with him some advice I received from one of our counselors here at Smoke Rise, Gloria White. I refer to it as the “Cycle of Life.” Before I tell you about that advice, let me share some preliminary comments.

**There are many things in life that can control us.** Some of these are fears, habits, addictions, poisonous attitudes, unhealthy relationships and crises. These things keep us from achieving potential and living life to the fullest because they lead to a poor self-image, depression, lack of faith in God, an inability to trust others and a distorted view of life.

**It is possible to break free from these things.** This is one of the major themes of the Bible. The most important event recorded in the Old Testament reminds us of this hope. The children of Israel were living in misery as slaves in Egypt. As a result, they were struggling with the very things I mentioned above, poor self image, depression, lack of faith, an inability to trust others and a distorted view of life.

However, with God’s help, they broke free from those who were holding them back and so can we. The message of the Exodus in the Old Testament and the Gospel in the New Testament is that we do not have to live in bondage to anyone or anything unless we choose to do so.

**How do you break free from addictions, fears, bad attitudes and unhealthy relationships?** There are several things you must do. In other words, it is a process.

**First of all, you must have a desire, strong desire.** “You’ve got to want to want to” is what a friend told me years ago. How true that is.

**Then, you must acknowledge that you cannot overcome your problem on your own.** You must have help. Evidently, this problem is bigger than you are or you would have already overcome it.

**Thirdly, you must ask for help from God and others.** It is not enough to know you need help. You must also ask for it. Reach out to God, family, friends, support groups and professionals.

Speaking of professionals, let me tell you what Gloria White, one of our counselors, taught me. I have shared it with many fellow strugglers.

**All of us are one of three places in our lives.** We are in bondage, the wilderness or the Promise Land. In other words, we are either enslaved to something or someone, in transition away from that which is controlling us or we have broken free and are preparing to face new struggles.

**Secondly, we do not go directly from bondage to the Promise Land.** The children of Israel did not and we shall not either. We go from bondage to the wilderness. Why?

Why did the Israelites have to go through the wilderness? They had a lot of lessons to learn and only that experience could teach them.

What did they need to learn? They needed to learn dependence upon God. They needed to learn that life was filled with choices and consequences and they must look to God for wisdom and guidance. They needed to learn that life was filled with challenges and obstacles and they must look to God for courage and confidence. They needed to learn that life was filled with dangers and disappointments and they must look to Him for strength and comfort. Most importantly, though, they needed to learn the value of living one day at a time with complete trust in Him.

We need to learn those same lessons and this is why we must go from bondage to the wilderness, not the Promise Land. It is in the wilderness that a relationship is forged with a God who will help us fight and win one battle at a time.

**Thirdly, the Promise Land is not the same as heaven.** Only heaven is heaven. In our fantasies, the Promise Land is a place where all our problems will be solved and no more will surface. That really is a fantasy. That place does not exist on earth.

Instead, the Promise Land is a place, and it can be any place, where I live one day at a time relying upon God to help me make wise decisions. It is a place where I look to God to help me overcome my challenges, problems and temptations. It is a place where I say yes to those things that are good and no to those things that are bad. In short, it is a place where I live responsibly.

When the Israelites came to the Jordan and sent twelve spies into the Promise Land, what did ten of them report? They told the people that the land was filled with giants and there was no way they could be conquered. In other words, the land did not match their fantasies of a place flowing with milk and honey ready for their possession. As a result, they became fearful, disillusioned and negative.

The same thing can happen to us if we fantasize about our Promise Land. The Promise Land is not a problem free place but a place where we have learned how to confront and handle our problems.

**Finally, I learned from Gloria that you can go from the Promise Land back to bondage.** Israel did. Why? They became overconfident and quit relying upon God. They became complacent and quit listening to Him. They became rebellious and quit following Him. They put more trust in themselves than God. As a result, they went from the Promise Land back to bondage and had to learn these lessons all over again.

I see this happen frequently. After listening to people describe their feelings of being overwhelmed by their problems, I ask about their spiritual pilgrimage. Far too many times, they tell me about how a once close relationship with God has grown distant. My heart breaks for them, because I know they have made the biggest mistake of all. They have gone from the Promise Land back to bondage and now they must head back into the wilderness. The cycle continues.

By the way, I talked this week to my friend who is trying to kick his drug habit. He is still in the wilderness, but is more concerned with moving to the Promise Land than going back to Egypt. I'm certainly glad and pray he will make it. I pray that you and I will, too.