



**LESSON 2**

# **The Battle Within**

**1** Last week's challenge was to read from the book of Acts. Share which sections you read and what inspired you most.

## Introduction

Hopefully, since last week's lesson we are more interested in experiencing the Holy Spirit in our lives; he is so much more than we realize or understand. We touched on a variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us grow in our relationship with God. He is truly the source and strength of our spiritual life. The chocolate milk analogy emphasized the importance of inviting the Holy Spirit to be active and influence our lives on a regular basis.

Despite genuine desires and attempts to follow God, sometimes—deep down—we aren't sure how good we are at it. We don't seem to be able to be as spiritual as we think we should be. Perhaps we struggle with discouragement, feeling defeated or lack of motivation.

Today's lesson aims to expose this “battle within” and assure us that it is quite normal and, frankly, to be expected. It is precisely when we realize our weakness and inability to master the Christian life on our own strength that we realize our need for God's grace and help. We receive this grace in the Person and presence of the Holy Spirit.

**2** What are some obvious obstacles that might cause someone to struggle in faithfulness to God?

**3** What are more subtle obstacles a person might encounter in their faith life?

**4** What helps you make a spiritual turnaround?

# Struggles and Our Relationship with God

**5** If you were struggling spiritually, which image would best represent your relationship with God?



**OUTSIDE OF MY LIFE**



**PART OF MY LIFE**



**CENTRE OF MY LIFE**



**OUTSIDE OF MY LIFE**



**PART OF MY LIFE**



**CENTRE OF MY LIFE**

## **6 Underline what stands out for you in this section.**

We may feel that if we are struggling, we are best represented by the middle image even though we have invited Jesus into our lives. We choose the middle one because we think we are not faithful enough to be in the third one.

We must remember that these images represent the kinds of commitments we make, not levels of perfection. If we have sanctifying grace in our souls through Baptism, repent of our failures, live a sacramental life in the Church, and choose to follow, love and honour God, we are living a Christ-centred relationship. If this is how we live, we can be confident that God's love and commitment to us is unchanging.

Our struggles may occur because other concerns or interests are usurping God's rightful place in our lives, or are leading us into sin. When these sins are *venial* (not of a serious nature) we don't need to worry that we have lost our secure relationship with God. Certainly, we need to repent, change and mature. Our relationship with God is continually growing and, just as in marriage, we have to work through the daily struggles. God is not surprised by our weakness, nor is he anxious to leave or drop us whenever we fail or disappoint him. It would be ridiculous if a married couple found themselves sometimes married or sometimes single several times throughout the week, depending on how good a spouse each partner was. The same is true in our relationship with God: our commitment is not severed by day-to-day failures and weaknesses.

While venial sin does not sever our relationship with God, mortal sin can. Avoiding *mortal* sin (serious sin that is wilfully committed with full knowledge of its gravity) is crucial to the integrity of our relationship. Mortal sin separates us from the protection of God's saving grace; committing a sin of this nature means we have rejected God from our lives. He is not in the centre, and our relationship becomes represented by the first or second image.

However, even if we sin mortally, we can still be reconciled with God. His mercy is endless. Our loving Father longs to restore us to a right relationship with himself. Through our true contrition (sincere sorrow), confession to a priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation, and works of penance, we can respond to his invitation to begin again.

As we strive to live out this Christ-centred relationship, we have not been left alone to carry it out on our own. We have been given the help of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us and empowers us.

## **7 Does this explanation change the way you would answer which image best represents your relationship with God? Why?**

We are bound to encounter challenges along with growth in our relationship with God. Even with sanctifying grace in our souls, we still have to struggle with our personal weaknesses and temptations. In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul shares his own struggles with the ups and downs of the spiritual life.

# Paul's Struggle

## **8** Read Romans 7:18-25. What problem is Paul experiencing? Can you relate to his struggle? How?

*For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am!*

*Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.*

## **9** What do you think Paul means by *the flesh*?

## **10** How can Paul's experience give us hope?

# Paul's Solution

## **11** Read Romans 8:1-17. Identify (by colour coding, circling, etc.) what Paul says pertains to the flesh, and what pertains to the Spirit.

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

*But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.*

*So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

## **12** We are no longer condemned to hopeless despair as slaves to sin. How were we freed from slavery to the law of sin and death? (Especially in verses 1-4.)

## **13** How does Paul counsel us to live in this truth and fight “the flesh” from ruling our lives?

### **A) 8:5-8.**

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

### **B) 8:12-13.**

*So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

### **C) 8:14.**

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.*

### **D) 8:15-17.**

*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

## **14** What have you learned from this lesson and from reflecting on Romans 7 and 8?

# Summary

The spiritual life is a battle—we must constantly struggle to overcome our sinful tendencies. This battle is not only experienced by those who are far from God—even saints like Paul had to fight to stay faithful. Thankfully, in the midst of our struggles, God is our great encourager. Through Jesus we have been set free from slavery to sin, and through the Holy Spirit we are given the means to live a life pleasing to God.

## Living It Out

### **CHALLENGE**

Partake of the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is a sure means of grace when fighting sinful tendencies.

### **MEMORIZE ROMANS 8:1-2**

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*