

The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Paul says in Romans 7:15, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” This is a total description of the human condition. How many of us have made decisions or new year resolutions like ‘I am going to eat healthy’, ‘read the Bible’, ‘exercise’... and find yourself watching to more and not able to accomplish what you set out to do?

How many times have you made a decision to do something and find you don’t have the willpower to follow through? Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and hoping the disciples will stay awake and pray with him but when he returned after an hour they were all asleep. Maybe they said to themselves, we will just rest our eyes for a minute...it will only be for a few minutes...only to find themselves totally asleep. We can all relate to the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. It is a constant battle with our flesh. The truth is that the human will is very weak. We all have good intentions but good intentions alone do not cut it. It must be followed by good actions.

We all want to pray more, read the Bible more, serve more, we want to give more, we want to get angry less, worry less, take our ourselves less seriously, we want to be more spiritual, but Jesus tells us the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

Many of the problems we have are the ability to force our flesh to submit to the spirit. We have to be able to make a decision and stick to it.

So, what can we do if our spirit is willing but our flesh is weak?

We should not give up on the things we have to do. We need to have a plan.

Jesus said, Watch and pray so you don’t fall into temptation.” Prayer is the best practical remedy that we can use in time of trouble. Jesus prayed often and when his soul was sorrowful he prayed. The first place to turn for help is to God. We must believe that nothing is too big or too small to be laid before the Lord. We can accomplish the will of God through prayer.

The purpose of prayer is to focus our lives on God. When Jesus was torn between two worlds he focused on doing the Father’s will through prayer. He prayed, “Not my will but your will be done.” Prayer allows us to focus on the will of God. Not to satisfy our ego.

A guest at the banquet was about to eat the food without prayer and the lady said, “We say grace before we eat every meal because it reminds us that there is something bigger than our own egos.” Prayer frees us from the pull of the world and reminds us of the goodness and power of God. Prayer is what moves us from self-centeredness to the awe and wonder of God.

Prayer frees us from having our own way

Jesus prayed in the garden many times, "Let this cup pass." Paul prayed many times asking God to remove the thorn in his flesh. Like Jesus and Paul, if the cup does not pass or the thorn is not removed, God will provide us the grace we need to endure whatever burdens are given to us. Through our prayers God cares for us.

We must submit to the will of God many times.

Our will and our prayer, is for God to do something we like and want. As we mature in our faith we realize prayer actually allows us to relinquish our will to God. We are able to say, "Thy will be done."

Even though we want our own way, we all wish and want many things and forget that the things we want may not be the best for us. Life can be disappointing, hopes can be dashed, things may not go according to plan, but we must always learn to trust in the will of God.

Even though we are Christians and sanctified and renewed by the power of God we are still human and the flesh tries to control us. The flesh is still corrupt and fallen and that conflict between the spirit and flesh is always going on within. Many times our spirits are willing but the flesh is weak.

That is not an excuse to not do the right thing. Jesus did not excuse the disciples. He told them if you do not want to fall asleep at the wheel, if you do not want to fall asleep at the wrong times then you have to watch and pray. We should always be conscious of the fact that we are like soldiers fighting in God's army and we should always be vigilant and be on guard. We cannot be careless with the guarding of our souls because the enemy is prowling like a lion seeking someone to devour. We should always be mindful that the devil is busy. The only way we can overcome when the spirit is willing and the flesh is weak, is to watch and pray.

We should treat our spiritual life like athletes running a race, a marathon or playing sports. In order to thrive we have to work out, practice and stay in shape. We have to go to the gym regularly if we want to stay in shape. Any guesses about people who go to the gym regularly and those who don't? The people who go regularly are those who come early in the morning. See, by the end of the day there are all kinds of distractions, excuses, not to go to the gym. We are tired from work, we have errands to run, dinner is waiting and we procrastinate again and don't go. But people who go early in the morning make the decision before all the pressures of the day start adding up and they get into a rhythm and it's easy to keep going.

If you are trying to diet, throw away the donuts now and if you are trying to get out of debt cut the credit card now, not later. It is the same with spiritual things, watch and pray in the morning so that you do not fall into temptation.

Don't do it alone

Get an accountable partner. If you want to start praying more get a prayer partner, and the same with Bible Study, do it together with someone who will hold you accountable. It is much harder for you to back out when someone else is involved.

Are you fasting or giving something up for Lent? Tell someone about it. Otherwise you would change your mind pretty soon.

Train your body like athletes or soldiers

If we can train ourselves spiritually, our body will follow so that our good intentions can translate into good actions, but it is not easy because it is easier said than done.

If we engage in all the spiritual disciplines then when tough times comes we will be able to stand because we have prepared ourselves for the challenge.

This is what Lent is all about. It is about making the spiritual preparation. It is like making the decisions to go to the gym. We are making the decisions to build our spiritual muscles now. Lent is a time to shape us spiritually and train us so that when the time of crisis comes we don't fall. We do not know when we will face crisis. Jesus told the disciples to watch and pray so you don't fall into temptation. He wants our spirit and flesh to be on the same page.