

## ***Victory over the Darkness (2000)***

Anderson's first published book turned into a popular work with over 1.3 million copies in print.<sup>1</sup> His focus on Christian identity has been one of the defining focuses of his ministry. The influence and emphasis of this work makes it essential to understand in detail the claims and teachings that Anderson advocates in this work.

**Chapter 1: "Who Are You?"** Anderson quickly argues towards an emphasis on love being personally practiced and corporately reproduced in the process of discipleship.<sup>2</sup> He expresses that "maturity is the product of time, pressure, trials, tribulations, the knowledge of God's Word, an understanding of who you are in Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life."<sup>3</sup> Anderson believes that "the critical foundation of your belief system and your behavior patterns as a Christian" is rooted in "your understanding of who God is and who you are in relationship to Him."<sup>4</sup> He continues by describing what it means to be a child of God in light of God's plan of

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson, *Rough Road*, 269.

<sup>2</sup>"The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith—I Tim 1:5. . . . Discipleship counseling is the process where two or more people meet together in the presence of Christ, learn how the truth of God's word can set them free and thus are able to conform to the image of God as they walk by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. . . . Ultimately, every Christian is responsible for his/her own maturity and freedom in Christ." Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 16-18.

<sup>3</sup>"We cannot receive instant maturity. It will take us the rest of our lives to renew our minds and conform to the image of God, but it doesn't take as long to realize our identity and freedom in Christ." Ibid., 19-21.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 24.

salvation.<sup>5</sup> He summarizes the chapter saying, “your sense of personal worth comes from knowing who you are as a child of God and your growth in character.”<sup>6</sup>

**Chapter 2: “The Whole Gospel.”** Anderson then describes his thesis that many Christians “are not living free and productive lives because they don’t understand who they are and why they are here.”<sup>7</sup> He believes that the root of this problem is with an incomplete understanding of the gospel, producing “forgiven sinners instead of redeemed saints.”<sup>8</sup> As a corrective, Anderson communicates the importance of understanding that eternal life begins at the point of salvation, not at the point of physical death.<sup>9</sup> As one better understands who they are in Christ, they will be equipped to live life behaviorally as the saints that they already are ontologically.<sup>10</sup> He ultimately holds

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<sup>5</sup>“You are a whole person and possess a life of infinite meaning and purpose because of who you are—a child of God. . . . The only identity equation that works in God’s kingdom is you plus Christ equals wholeness and meaning. . . . Being created in the image of God is what gives us the capacity to fully think, feel, and choose. . . . It is God’s eternal plan to bring human creation back to Himself and restore the union He enjoyed with Adam at creation. That restored union with God we find ‘in Christ,’ is what defines who we are as children of God. . . . In Christ we are able to know God personally because we have received the mind of Christ in our inner selves at salvation.” Ibid., 26-31.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>7</sup>“Who they are is rooted in their identity and position in Christ.” Ibid., 43.

<sup>8</sup>“For some unknown reason, we have left the Resurrection out of the gospel presentation. Consequently, we end up with forgiven sinners instead of redeemed saints.” Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 45.

<sup>9</sup>“If we don’t have spiritual (eternal) life before we die physically, we can anticipate only hell. . . . What does it mean to be spiritually alive in Christ? The moment you were born again your soul came into union with God in the same way Adam was in union with God before the Fall. You became spiritually alive and your name was written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev. 21:27).” Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>“It is not what you do as a Christian that determines who you are; it is who you are that determines what you do (II Cor 5:17; Eph 2:120; I Pet 2:9-10; I John 3:1-2). . . . Next to a knowledge of God, a knowledge of who you are is by far the most important truth you can possess. . . . Clearly, the term ‘saint’ is used in Scripture to refer to the believer, and ‘sinner’ is used in reference to the unbeliever. . . . As believers, we are not trying to become saints; we are saints who are becoming like Christ. . . . Because you are a saint in Christ by God’s calling, you share in Christ’s inheritance.” Ibid., 47-51.

that the believer's only hope rests in a full gospel understanding that "you are a child of God now, who is being conformed to the image of God."<sup>11</sup>

**Chapter 3: "See Yourself for Who You Really Are."** Anderson understands sanctification in the past tense as "positional sanctification and refers to the position or the status the believer has in Christ" and in the present tense refers to "progressive or experiential sanctification."<sup>12</sup> He explains that the "foundational truth from which you live" as a Christian is "that God is your loving Father and you are His accepted child."<sup>13</sup> He acknowledges that believers can "interfere with the harmony of my relationship with God" when they fail to trust and obey.<sup>14</sup> Even when Christians "fail to take Him at His Word or choose to walk by the flesh," their "relationship with Him is not at stake, because we are related by the blood of Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup> He concludes that it is "equally important" that Christians perceive and treat one another rightly as children of God.<sup>16</sup>

**Chapter 4: "Something Old, Something New."** In this chapter Anderson highlights what occurs in a believer at the point of salvation.<sup>17</sup> He describes Christians as having an important choice to "walk (or live) according to the flesh (Gal 5:19-21) or they

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>12</sup>"The process of sanctification begins at our new birth and ends in our glorification." Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>14</sup>"Harmony with God is based on the same concerns as harmony with my earthly father: trust and obedience." Ibid., 67.

<sup>15</sup>Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 67.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>17</sup>"We were born physically alive but spiritually dead. We had neither the presence of God in our lives nor the knowledge of His ways. Consequently, we all learned to live our lives independently of God. . . . Positionally, several things changed at salvation. First, God transferred us from the domain of darkness 'to the kingdom of His beloved Son' (Col 1:13) Second, sin's dominion through the flesh has been broken. As a believer, you are no longer in the flesh, you are in Christ." Ibid., 74-75.

can walk (or live) according to the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).”<sup>18</sup> He argues that the purpose of spiritual growth is “so you can *be* like Christ, not just *act* like Him.”<sup>19</sup> Anderson holds that “we are neither saved nor sanctified by how we behave but by how we believe” but that believers have responsibilities in crucifying their old nature (the flesh) and in “being a child of God and being free in Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

**Chapter 5: “Becoming the Spiritual Person God Wants You to Be.”** In this chapter Anderson suggests that there are three types of people: the natural, the spiritual, and the fleshy.<sup>21</sup> He encourages believers to evaluate their lives to determine whether they are walking in the flesh or the spirit.<sup>22</sup> He promotes the importance of an ongoing walk of “faith in the power of the Holy Spirit” in order to live a productive Christian life.<sup>23</sup> He remarks that Christian freedom lies “in the ability to choose to live responsibly within the context of the protective guidelines God has established for our lives.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>“Christians are no longer in the flesh, but because the characteristics of the flesh remain in believers, they have a choice.” Ibid., 75.

<sup>19</sup>“Spiritual growth in the Christian life requires a relationship with God who is the fountain of spiritual life, a relationship that brings a new seed or root of life.” Ibid., 77, 81.

<sup>20</sup>“The flesh, our old nature, has to be crucified by the believer (Gal 5:24). . . . Being a child of God and being free in Christ is positional truth and the birthright of every believer.” Ibid., 84-86.

<sup>21</sup>“The natural man has a soul; . . . however, his mind and subsequently his emotions and his will are directed by his flesh, which acts completely apart from the God who created him. . . . The spiritual man . . . has been remarkably transformed from the natural person he was before spiritual birth. At conversion, his spirit became united with God’s spirit . . . His mind has been renewed and transformed. . . . The fleshly person is a Christian, spiritually alive in Christ, and declared righteous by God . . . though free to choose to walk after the spirit and produce fruit of the spirit, he continues to involve himself in sinful activity by willfully walking after the flesh.” Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 93-97.

<sup>22</sup>“How can you know if you are walking according to the flesh or according to the Spirit? Take a look at your life. “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident . . . (Gal 5:19-21).” Ibid., 105.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>24</sup>“Christianity is a relationship, not a ritual or a religious code of ethics. . . . If the Spirit-filled walk is neither license nor legalism, what is it? It is liberty . . . you have the choice to walk according to the Spirit or to walk according to the flesh.” Ibid., 101-3.

**Chapter 6: “The Power of Believing the Truth.”** In this chapter, Anderson brings forth the importance of Christians truthfully knowing the “object of your faith.”<sup>25</sup> He writes about the importance of correct belief, communicating that “everything we do is essentially a product of what we have chosen to believe.”<sup>26</sup> He proposes that God’s unconditional and irrevocable love is the defining truth of the Christian life.<sup>27</sup>

**Chapter 7: “You Can’t Live Beyond What You Believe.”** Anderson postulates that your beliefs are the foundation of how you live.<sup>28</sup> He specifically encourages readers to evaluate their lives for bitterness, anger, resentment, anxiety, or depression to quickly see the need for right goals based on right beliefs.<sup>29</sup> He offers that “a godly goal is any specific orientation that reflects God’s purpose for your life and is not dependent on people or circumstances beyond your ability or right to control.”<sup>30</sup> He concludes that times of difficulty can not only reveal wrong goals, desires, and beliefs but can become “the catalyst for achieving God’s goal for our lives, which is our sanctification—the process of conforming to His image.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>“The only difference between Christian faith and non-Christian faith is the object of our faith. . . . How much faith you have is dependent upon how well you know the object of your faith.” Ibid., 109-10.

<sup>26</sup>“Believing something doesn’t make it true and not believing something doesn’t make it false.” Ibid., 113.

<sup>27</sup>“The primary truth you need to know about God for your faith to remain strong is that His love and acceptance are unconditional. . . . No matter what you do or how you fail, God will still love you because the love of God is not dependent upon its object; it is dependent upon His character.” Ibid., 117-19.

<sup>28</sup>“Walking by faith simply means that you function in daily life on the basis of what you believe.” Ibid., 124.

<sup>29</sup>“When an experience leaves you feeling angry, anxious, or depressed, those emotional signposts are there to alert you that you may be cherishing a faulty goal based on a wrong belief. . . . People who cannot control those who frustrate their goals will probably respond by getting bitter, angry, or resentful.” Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 126, 130.

<sup>30</sup>“A godly desire is any specific result that depends on the cooperation of other people, the success of events or favorable circumstances you have no right or ability to control.” Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>31</sup>“Trials and tribulations reveal wrong goals, but they can actually be the catalyst for achieving God’s goal for our lives, which is our sanctification—the process of conforming to His image. During these

**Chapter 8: “God’s Guidelines for the Walk of Faith.”** Anderson considers how many people struggle with identity, fulfillment, and satisfaction issues in life, proposing that believers must understand their identity in Christ and grow in character in order to have a biblically lasting sense of worth.<sup>32</sup> He reminds readers that success and significance are derivatives of focusing and prioritizing God’s goal for our lives.<sup>33</sup> Anderson posits that fulfillment “is discovering our own uniqueness in Christ and using our gifts and talents to edify others and to glorify the Lord.”<sup>34</sup> He believes God’s plan for happiness comes through honest transparency, eternal focus, and contentment with God’s provision.<sup>35</sup> He concludes with an encouragement to experience the peace of God through “personal prayer and interaction with God’s Word. . . . (Phil 4:6-7; Col 3:15-16).”<sup>36</sup>

**Chapter 9: “Winning the Battle for Your Mind.”** Anderson advances his argument that our spiritual battle is for our mind, urging Christians to take their thoughts captive to God’s truths.<sup>37</sup> He cautions that “Satan’s strategy is to introduce his thoughts

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times of pressure, our emotions raise their warning flags, signaling blocked, uncertain, or impossible goals based on our desires instead of God’s goal of proven character.” Ibid., 135.

<sup>32</sup>“Your sense of worth is based on your identity in Christ and your growth in character, both of which are equally accessible to every Christian.” Ibid., 141.

<sup>33</sup>“Success is accepting God’s goal for our lives and by His grace becoming what He has called us to be. . . . If you want to increase your significance, focus your energies on significant activities: those what will remain for eternity.” Ibid., 142.

<sup>34</sup>“The key to personal satisfaction is not found in broadening the scope of your activities but in deepening them through a commitment to quality.” Ibid., 143-45.

<sup>35</sup>“God’s concept of happiness is summed up in the simple proverb: ‘Happy is the man who wants what he has’ . . . Chief among the inhibitors of Christian fun is our fleshly tendency to keep up appearances. . . . Insecurity means depending upon temporal things that we have no right or ability to control.” Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 146-47.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>37</sup>“The more time and energy you invest in contemplating your own plans on how to live your life, the less likely you are to seek God’s plan. . . . If you don’t take captive the initial thought, you will probably lose the battle to temptation . . . we need to take the way of escape the moment our thoughts are contrary to the truth and righteousness. . . . If what we think does not reflect truth, then what we feel does

and ideas into your mind and to deceive you into believing that they are yours” because the devil knows that “once a stronghold of thought and response is entrenched in your mind, your ability to choose and to act contrary to that pattern is very difficult.”<sup>38</sup>

Anderson desires that Christians understand that “dealing with Satan is not a power encounter; it is a truth encounter” and they must renew their mind “by filling it with God’s Word.”<sup>39</sup> He concludes with the prompting to “choose the truth and keep choosing it until it becomes the normal pattern of your life.”<sup>40</sup>

**Chapter 10: “You Must Be Real to Be Right.”** Anderson confronts the notion that people are shaped by our environment or history, countering that “God determines who you are, and your interpretation of life’s events determines how well you will handle the pressures of life.”<sup>41</sup> He challenges the believer to rightly understand and to honestly express one’s feelings.<sup>42</sup> Likewise he encourages learning to rightly “respond to others when they honestly acknowledge their pain.”<sup>43</sup> Finally, he concludes the chapter with a reemphasis on renewing your mind with the inclusion of “managing your

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not reflect reality.” Ibid., 152-56.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 159. Related verses are 1 Pet 1:13 “preparing your mind for action, being sober-minded,” 2 Cor 4:4 “the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,” 2 Cor 10:4-5 “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

<sup>39</sup>“Satan has no authority or power over you except what you yield to him when you are deceived into believing his lies.” Ibid., 161-62.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 163.

<sup>41</sup>“Life’s events don’t determine who you are.” Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 171.

<sup>42</sup>“Your emotions are to your soul what your physical feelings are to your body. . . . In God’s eyes, if you are not real, you are not right. If necessary, God may have to make you real to make you right with Him.” Ibid., 173, 178.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 180.

emotions by managing your thoughts and acknowledging your feelings honestly and lovingly in your relationships with others.”<sup>44</sup>

**Chapter 11: “Healing Emotional Wounds from Your Past.”** Anderson asserts that “God doesn’t fix our past, but He does set us free from it.”<sup>45</sup> He writes that “people are not in bondage to past traumas. They are in bondage to the lies they believed about themselves, God and how to live as a result of the trauma.”<sup>46</sup> He encourages healing through the analysis of past events based on a believer’s identity in Christ.<sup>47</sup> When relating to others, believers must remember to “base our relationships with others on the same criteria on which God bases His relationship with us: love, acceptance, and forgiveness.”<sup>48</sup> He wraps up the chapter by defining and describing different aspects and applications of forgiveness.<sup>49</sup>

**Chapter 12: “Dealing with Rejection in Your Relationships.”** Many people in life have experienced rejection, so Anderson addresses this important area in order to assist people in dealing with past rejection and preparing for future rejection.<sup>50</sup> He exhorts people to take responsibility for their own character and for reaching out to meet

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 184. Perhaps a better word in this statement would have been “erase” instead of “fix.”

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>47</sup>“Perceiving those events from the perspective of your new identity in Christ is what starts the process of healing those damaged emotions.” Ibid., 189.

<sup>48</sup>Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 190.

<sup>49</sup>“Forgiveness means resolving to live with the consequences of another person’s sin. . . . Forgiveness is a crisis of the will, a conscious choice to let the other person off the hook and to free yourself from the past.” Ibid., 192-93.

<sup>50</sup>“The system has rejected them and therefore they find it easy to reject themselves. Any success or acceptance that comes their way will be questioned or doubted on the basis of what they already believe about themselves. . . . If you find yourself responding to rejection defensively, turn your attention to those things that will build you up and establish you in your faith.” Ibid., 202-6.

the needs of others.<sup>51</sup> He cautions of Satan's attacks in tempting us "to focus on our rights instead of our responsibilities" and warns against trying "to play the role of the Holy Spirit in someone else's life."<sup>52</sup> Anderson then makes the case for disciplining and accountability as part of the process of discipleship.<sup>53</sup> He concludes the chapter with the encouragement of allowing "other believers the privilege of meeting your legitimate needs."<sup>54</sup>

**Chapter 13: "People Grow Better Together."** Anderson finishes *Victory over the Darkness* with his hope for promoting discipleship as the "process of building the life of Christ in one another."<sup>55</sup> He connects evangelism to discipleship, writing "to disciple people, we have to first lead them to Christ so the Holy Spirit can bear witness with their spirits that they 'are children of God' (Rom 8:16)."<sup>56</sup> He lists the goals of discipleship as being to help other believers "become firmly rooted in Christ," "accept God's goal of sanctification and grow in the likeness of Christ," and to "function as believers in their homes, on their jobs, and in society."<sup>57</sup> He concludes his book by connecting Christian counseling with discipleship by describing its goal "to help people

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<sup>51</sup>"Before God, each of you is responsible for your own character . . . and meeting each other's needs." Ibid., 207.

<sup>52</sup>"When we attempt to play the role of the Holy Spirit in someone else's life, we misdirect their battle with God onto ourselves; and we are unqualified for the task." Ibid., 208-9.

<sup>53</sup>"Disciplining others is a part of our ministry; judging character is God's responsibility. . . . We must hold people accountable for their sinful behavior, but we are never allowed to denigrate their character." Ibid., 210.

<sup>54</sup>"By denying other believers the privilege of meeting your legitimate needs, you are acting independently of God and you are vulnerable to getting your needs met by the world, the flesh, and the devil." Ibid., 212.

<sup>55</sup>Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 217.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>57</sup>"The first goal of discipleship is to help those you disciple become firmly rooted in Christ. . . . The second goal of discipleship is to accept God's goal of sanctification and grow in the likeness of Christ. . . . The third goal of discipleship is to help others function as believers in their homes, on their jobs, and in society." Ibid., 222-25.

experience their freedom in Christ so they can move on to maturity and fruitfulness in their walk with Him.”<sup>58</sup>

**Summary.** Anderson uses his first book to establish what he sees as the biblical identity in Christian belief. He begins with the gospel, journeys into the importance and applications of believing truth, and finishes with a focus on extending personal victory into corporate victory through the process of discipleship. Anderson addresses a lot of areas of common struggle while directing Christians to a right understanding of who they are in Christ.

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 226.