



How can we take hold of God's promises and walk in freedom—not just for a day or a week but a sustained, lasting victory? Karl presents behavioral habits that hold you back, an understanding of how change happens, and strategies for winning wars grounded in Scripture.

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A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

In a split second, I went from talking to my wife on my car speakerphone to slamming on the brakes. My world went into slow motion. I was about to T-bone an SUV that ran a red light, and all I could do was brace for impact.

Wham! The collision was intense. Disoriented, I climbed out of my totaled vehicle. Walking through a fog of steam and acrid odor, I went to see how the other driver had fared. Amazingly, he was okay. The adrenaline in my system disguised injuries to my ankle, chest, and hand. Paramedics looked me over and covered a cut, advising me to get anything checked out that might show up later. Within hours, I knew something was wrong with my finger. The painful swelling was a clue to what X-rays showed—my finger was broken.

You will always see the symptoms and feel the pain of what's broken below the surface of your life. Although there may be many things in our lives that need to change, there is often one thing that, if ignored, will hurt us most. Unlike a broken finger, sin never heals on its own.

The One Thing

I host a national radio show from Chicago, *Karl & Crew*. One morning, I told my radio team I had a question I wanted us to ask the listeners. The first question would set up a bigger question. This first question was simple: “What one thing could our Chicago Bears football team change to give them more wins?” It was a painless question for which everybody seemed to have an opinion. Listeners gave many ideas on what to change: owner, coaches, players, offensive schemes, defensive schemes, and even concession selections. If you don’t win the Super Bowl, everybody is fair game for blame.

But the bigger question was next: “What is ‘the one thing’ that needs to change in your life so you can see more spiritual victory and receive God’s blessings?” The calls and text responses were overwhelming, and social media comments blew up. They knew “the one thing” in their lives and were ready to share it. I was blown away at the vulnerability and eagerness to share—like the question uncorked their souls.

Here are some direct quotes of the “one thing” listeners identified: poor time management, gluttony, destructive thoughts, rebellion, pride, porn, finances, anxiety, fear, gossip, disorganization, addiction, bad habits, bitterness, apathy, social media, and self.

The deluge of responses was only the first wave. Emails and notes came in for days and weeks as people realized that one thing is holding up everything when it comes to growing strong and gaining ground spiritually.

That morning, God got my wheels turning, thinking about the hundreds of Bible characters who either conquered “the one thing” or were devoured by it. David’s sexual sin, Judas’ greed, Amon’s idolatry, Cain’s anger, Peter’s arrogance, Simon the magician’s passion

for power, Sarah's lack of faith, and the rich young ruler's love of money. These are just a fraction of the biblical examples of "the one thing" standing in the way of a breakthrough to victory.

We all have at least one persistent sin that has hurt us, shamed us, or held us back. When asked to pin down that one thing that needs to be conquered, it likely comes straight to your mind. You may identify two or more equally destructive issues, but to secure a victory and not be overwhelmed, just hold on to the one thing that rises above the rest. That one thing is a problem. It stares at you and shames you until you look away or do something about it. Unaddressed, that one thing will diminish us, devastate those around us, or destroy us altogether. And when that one thing persists, it becomes a breeding ground for more things to build up—compromise, denial, and defeat—as we fall under a pile of shame.

But your story is still being written. God can handle your darkest sins and your hidden shame and heal your deepest pain. God's compassion and care are only outstripped by His passion and intention to help you. God can take the most challenging thing you bring Him and conquer it.

We All Start Strong

He started so strong. We all do. With such a head start, you could wonder how he messed it up. He was the kind of guy the women loved, and the men secretly hated. His good looks and stature made it into the Scriptures: "There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (1 Sam. 9:2).

A head taller and a head-turner, the people of Israel chose Saul to lead them, and God let them have their way. But Saul had

a fatal flaw. He followed God if it suited him. And if it didn't, he went his own way.

Early on, his mentor, Samuel, a godly man, coached him on following God, but Saul soon went off and did his own thing. After conquering several armies and sparing the lives of those who questioned his kingship, he started believing he could do no wrong.

Impatient, self-willed, and wanting to please his fans, he sacrificed to God before an agreed-upon time. It was all for show. He tried to consolidate his power with the people but jumped the gun and didn't wait for Samuel to show up according to God's plan. Then, he fought a battle against the Amalekites, leaving King Agag and the premium livestock alive when God had told him to wipe out everything. He then lied to Samuel by passing the buck and blaming it all on his people.

His excuse to Samuel was he wanted to sacrifice the good stuff to God. But Samuel knew that Saul feared man more than God and loved earthly power more than God's favor. Samuel's response to Saul's lie was epic and relevant to everyone today: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Unwilling to obey God and listen to His voice, Saul wore the robes of a king for the rest of his days, but his kingship was already dead—God had moved on and had His eye on David for king.

Saul soon went crazy. Demons harassed him, and only David's merciful strumming on a harp relieved Saul of his torment. Saul's hatred and jealousy of David ate his soul alive. Spending his last years obsessed with killing the king God had now chosen, Saul ignored the rising strength of the Philistines.

In his final battle with the Philistines, Saul committed suicide by falling on his sword. But the shame wasn't over. The Philistines

desecrated the bodies of Saul and his three sons. The Philistines paraded Saul's weapons among the Philistine people to raucous cheers. And they hung Saul and his sons' naked, beaten, and beheaded bodies on the wall of Beth-shan.

A handful of men courageously walked through the night to retrieve their fallen leader's body. It was so mutilated, they burned the flesh and preserved the bones to bury their king in honor and preserve the memory of a man who started strong and bright but ended weak and ugly.

How We End Matters Most

This ancient story illustrates a timeless truth: we all start strong, but how we end is the measure that matters most. You started strong; we all do. The new birth miracle of salvation is breathtaking. When you are born again, a whole new life has come, and the old life has gone. You no longer live because the old you died, and Christ lives in you. You have a friend in Jesus, a comforter in the Holy Spirit, and all the power you need to live a godly life.

But life goes on. Temptation gives us no rest. The world confines us to broken, impotent systems. And our old appetites can creep back in. When faced with crippling idols and substitute gods that have taken hold of us, we have one thing to do—"be killing sin or sin will be killing you."¹

Each day presents battles that some don't survive. Like Saul, most of us find ourselves with a flaw that can grow to be fatal, leaving us tormented and stubbornly unwilling to take the way of

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escape. I know some of the most talented and gifted people who have wrecked their lives by living like Saul. They're still alive, but they have, in essence, fallen on their swords.

When conviction grips your soul, it is a strange blessing. The pain of seeing yourself as you are is the only passageway into richer fields of abundance. John Owen left us with hope in his 1656 classic, *The Mortification of Sin*. "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet."²

Sin deceives us by making us think that it's not a big deal or that no one will see it. But all sin is a big deal no matter how small the seed you sow. Persistent patterns of sin push us into the shadows of isolation, gnaw at our souls, and steal our joy of walking with Jesus.

I invite you to come face-to-face with God's words, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7–8).

We will reap corruption if we sow sin and don't kill it, but we will reap life if we sow to the Spirit. A spiritual cost-benefit analysis is clear. The stakes are high. Sin is serious. Romans 8:13 says, "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." Killing sin is a matter of life and death.



KILL SIN—

Reflection and Application

What is that one sin that is killing you?

How would your life change if you finally put it to death?

Romans 8:13 says killing sin is a matter of life and death. How serious are you about killing sin in your life?



Need help identifying
your **one thing**?

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