



Just before Christmas a friend arrived with a plate of home-made mincepies. Ooooooooooooo I felt like sitting down and eating them all and would have thoroughly enjoyed every bite! I have a very sweet tooth and love to eat cakes, puddings, biscuits, sweets and chocolate. Now there is nothing wrong with eating these, as long as they are eaten in moderation. When we have received a box of chocolates it is fine to eat a couple of them each day, but not good for us if we sit and empty the box on the same day, even though we might find that a very enjoyable experience!



These mincepies led me to think about overcoming. All of us have habits, actions and thoughts of some sort or other that we wish to change or stop being part of our lives, otherwise we would all be perfect people. How do we alter these things? How do we overcome habits and thoughts that we do not want to be part of our make-up? Are there some things that we are unable to alter?



Most of us have a favourite text or texts from the Bible and one of mine that particularly comes to mind, with regard to overcoming, is from Philippians 4: 13. 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' I have often gone back to this text repeatedly but have found that it is not a magic wand that can be waved and everything just falls into place in one quick moment. It is interesting that there is no time limit to it. Sometimes we may be able to overcome in a few days yet at other times we may battle for years without overcoming. For those who have drug or alcohol addictions it may seem as if there is nothing that can free them from something that is holding them in such a firm grip.

POWER

The word 'strengthen' in this verse is not talking about muscle and physical strength but refers to being made powerful inwardly. We can all try to overcome things in our own strength, but however hard we try there are times when we

need more than that to be an overcomer. Yes, God wants us to be independent and individual to a certain extent, nevertheless, there comes a point when He wants us to rely on Him instead of on ourselves. His desire for us is that we become powerful inwardly so that we are able to overcome whatever problems we have to face. There are most certainly times when God takes away the desire instantly for something that controls our lives, whenever He chooses to do so, but often it is a matter of going back to Him again and again and asking Him to give us the strength that we need for us to be the people that He wants us to be.



In one of his other letters Paul, who wrote the letters to the Philippians, writes, 'I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate'; so even Paul must sometimes have had difficulties with overcoming. I am sure that most of us are in



agreement with Paul and find that there are occasions when we do and say things that we do not wish to be part of our lives and yet we still continue with them. We are strange people aren't we? God knows the struggles we have and is always there to help us to be overcomers. Some may have more of a struggle than others because we have all been created as individuals and no two people are exactly alike, however, God encourages us to keep on trying as many times as it takes as He gives us inward power each day to assist us.



What do we have to do in order to obtain this inward power that God has promised? It is certainly not a matter of quoting the text and then expecting immediate results; neither is it a case of attempting to live a good life so that God will reward us by answering our every request. We gain inward strength from God as we build up a relationship with Him. If we wish to build up a relationship with anyone then we

have to spend time with them in order that we might get to know them. It is exactly the same with our relationship with God. We cannot expect God to 'zap' away a bad habit by quoting a text and everything falls into place in seconds; He wants our time, our prayers and our commitment. God can easily manage without us but we are not able to live a 100% fulfilled life without Him.

There are many people for whom God has no part in their lives and who are quite happy with their families, work, hobbies etc.. All of these things are fine but they do not give the inward strength that Paul writes about to the Philippians. He lists how he went through beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, hunger and other hardships. It was through the inner strength that God gave him that he was able to endure these awful things and continue the work of travelling around, writing and preaching.

When we accept Jesus into our lives we receive an inner strength that is outside of our own capabilities. This does not mean that we will then have no more problems or nothing will ever go wrong in our lives, but that we will be enabled to cope better with whatever life throws at us. It is this same inner strength that will help us to be overcomers in such a way that would not be possible without God's help. Some things may be a constant struggle for us but we can go back to the verse in Philippians over and over again.

Mincepies are soon eaten. Chocolates may not last long – especially as the number of them produced in the box grows less and less before we even open the box! Food, cigarettes, drugs and alcohol are always there to tempt those who are vulnerable and find it hard to resist yet God's promise is firm, never goes away and is there to help every one of us to be overcomers in everything that we do or say.

