

Wake Up!

Sober Up!

Regina Braden, Heather Hougland, & Aisha Jenya



Wake Up! Sober Up!

THE ROAD TO SPIRITUAL SOBRIETY



By Regina Braden, Heather Hougland, and Aisha Jenya

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Introduction

Wake up, Sober Up is an eight-chapter study that challenges the reader to wake up and evaluate attitudes, behaviors and conditions which negatively impact their distinctiveness, influence, and efficacy as witnesses and disciples of Christ. Often, we are oblivious to the subtleties that chip away at our calling in Christ and the convictions we once held so dearly or those never fully realized. We become distracted by the cares of this world and find ourselves conforming to man-made ideologies and systems instead of rejecting these errors and allowing the transforming power of God's Word to keep us grounded and aligned with His will.

We may find ourselves going through the motions, unmotivated and uninspired, living day to day in ritualistic fashion without any concern for our spiritual responsibilities and obligations. However, to remain in a spiritual stupor or state of indifference and complacency will render us fruitless and useless for the work of our Lord. It's high time that we arise from the drunkenness of sin and take hold of God's gift of salvation.

This study is to encourage all along the road less traveled, the road to spiritual sobriety that ultimately leads to eternal life.

Dedication

To all who desire to awake to righteousness and remain alert, sober and vigilant as we await the coming of the Lord.

To Brother Sabin Johnson, the minister of the Watkins Rd. church of Christ where we all worship, thank you for your powerful sermons, thorough teaching, and outstanding service to God. Also, thank you for crafting this idea and challenging the three of us to work together to produce a bible study that would help others who are striving for a stronger Christian life.

*“Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”””*

Ephesians 5:14 NKJV



*“And do this, knowing the time,
that now it is high time to awake out of sleep;
for now our salvation is nearer
than when we first believed.”*

Romans 13:11 NKJV



*“Therefore let us not sleep,
as others do, but let us watch and be sober.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:6 NKJV

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Chapter 1 – *The Walking Dead*



Physically alive, spiritually dead

The Walking Dead chapter title may sound like the name of a gory horror movie where brain dead zombies aimlessly wander about terrorizing others. While we will not discuss horror movies, we will seek to provide a study of the danger of being physically alive, yet day by day aimlessly wandering in a spiritually dead way disconnected from God, other Christians, and our true purpose.

Just like the zombie, we might not even know that we are aimlessly wandering because we are getting things done. We spend a lot of time, money, and effort pursuing our goals and receiving accolades, but deep down inside something is missing. True personal fulfillment is fleeting. So, although we may think we are getting the best of what this world offers to make us feel alive - if we never encounter what matters most – living a life made alive by God – then we are missing the opportunity for a relationship with the true life source.



Walking Dead

In Ephesians 2:1-6, Paul enlightens early Christians about how they were made alive in Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-6 NKJV

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”

Satan is the source of dead living. Paul teaches that God's great love makes us alive with Christ and reminds us that before submitting to God, we were walking around spiritually dead. Before we were Christians, we thought we were okay. We lived in habitual sin and supported values that aligned very closely to the world, measuring success and happiness by the world's standards. The tragedy of living in a spiritually dead state is that it lulls us into a complacent mindset that is not sober or vigilant, but instead it feeds into Satan's end game of devouring Christians (1 Peter 5:8).

Like those early Christians referenced in Ephesians 2, we also can think we are just fine, but doing so with sin as an ingrained behavior that goes unacknowledged, unchecked, and unforgiven. Our lifestyles can be busy in so many ways. Sometimes we chase dreams without considering how they fit into God's will for us. On the opposite end of the spectrum, maybe we have a full checklist of tasks to finish each day, but drift numbly, just going through the motions. Both efforts can produce an empty feeling inside because we do not include room for God's will. Without God guiding our path, we miss the fulfillment of meeting our spiritual potential.

Worldly ways of trying to feel alive fail. Many industries try to help enrich our lives by selling ways to reverse the hands of time, achieve a higher purpose, or have an intense once in a lifetime heart pounding experience. It can be very tempting to tap into resources as we chase goals and try to live "our best lives" through these methods. The problem is that worldly driven solutions for "best" do not include God's standards. So, we can try the newest fad to feel alive, but the feeling does not last, it is just a short-term fix. Like much that the world offers, it only feels good for a little while. Until what is truly problematic is addressed, which could be our way of thinking, until it is changed, a lasting fix should not be expected. For example, it is not hard to imagine how bungy jumping could offer a heart pounding, exhilarating experience. We may prepare ourselves and follow the instructions in anticipation of the big jump! However, afterwards, once the adrenalin rush and happiness of surviving the jump is over, it is just over. Successfully completing a bungy jump could give the courage to do other things in life, but does not provide the depth of personal insight, help to others, or endless tools that personal examination in the light of scripture can provide to support a lifetime of courage. The success of bungy jumping might make us want to feel that thrill of accomplishment again, so we choose to try the next level of thrill seeking – maybe parachuting. As Christians, we do not have to chase accomplishment in the same way as a world under Satan's influence does and expect it to work. The world provides self-centered, self-serving solutions that look to self for the answer. This inward focus for truth is an invitation to sin in our daily lives because we alone do not hold all the answers to our problems.

Grieving the Holy Spirit starves the soul. Self-absorbed living does not please God. Ephesians 4:30 teaches that Christians are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Habitually focusing on self, and not Christ, grieves the Holy Spirit because it promotes greater self-sufficiency and less Christ sustainability in the soul. Good fruit cannot sprout from this starvation! Galatians 5:16 and 22-23 highlight the evidence of what behaviors are present in lives consistently striving to live a life in the faith.

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

When we are not producing the fruit of the Spirit, it is highly likely we are serving up damaged spiritual fruit. While we may think our spiritual flaws are hidden from others, they are not. Our character and behavior flow from what resides in our heart and will tell the truth about us.



We are Alive!

Christians are so fortunate because God planned for us even when we were not thinking about living for Him. He knew the sinful state of His people and sent Jesus to redeem us from sin. In John 15:5 it is taught that branches are powerless without Him, the vine (John 15:5).

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing

God sent Christ to give life. Thankfully, submission to the gospel call through baptism, revives the non-Christian and repentance revives the Christian from their spiritually dead states! There is a popular term that people use when talking about something they love. They say, "It gives me life". Christ actually gives us LIFE! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Ephesians 2:1-5 teaches us that we were dead in our trespasses, it is Christ who makes us alive.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Have you ever been gardening on a warm sunny day? After a while, this physical work makes you dirty, sweaty, and just plain old uncomfortable. Think about how refreshing it is to enter an air-conditioned room, shed the dirty clothes, and take that refreshing shower. The change in your state is distinctive. You change from dirty to clean and feel restored! This is how it is when we allow ourselves to be transformed into a new creation who has submitted to the will of Christ!

Dwelling and holding onto our past sins and rejections appeals to our carnal nature and does not allow us to be transformed and refreshed! It is this sinful place within that resists treating the one who rejected us or did us wrong with love. Revenge or justification feels right. Yet, God has never treated us this way. It is the very love that God feels for us, his children, that caused him to send Christ (John 3:16) to save us and give us hope for eternal life.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 6:4 NKJV

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Becoming spiritually alive starts with our obedience to the gospel by submitting to baptism, where we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and are finally united with Christ in a new walk.

Renewed thinking gives life! Paul teaches in Romans 8 that when Christians think worldly thoughts our minds will refuse to submit to God. We are in enmity against God, the only one that can make us alive spiritually, and we therefore cannot please Him (vs. 7-8).

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

When in a sinful state, our thinking is spiritually dead because it is too influenced by what the world thinks. Paul characterizes worldly thinking as being in opposition to God. Persisting in this type of thinking is rejecting God's offer to make alive that which comes through building faith in our obedience to Christ.

Romans 12:2 further teaches that the way for us to avoid conforming to the world, is to transform our thinking from worldly to Godly. We must acknowledge that our old way of thinking, prior to becoming a Christian, did not produce a righteous end because it was characterized by unspiritual reasoning. Transforming our thinking from carnal to spiritual brings the will of God to the forefront of our minds.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This renewed way of thinking leads to better decision making and shedding our old ways. It encourages a new perspective on our purpose, life, and how to handle the situations we encounter. The old way that was separate from God did not give us peace of mind and strength of character that comes from walking in the counsel of wisdom as described in Psalms 1.

A look at the latest and hottest reality TV shows provides many examples of how one might view life from that old sinful perspective. Often the characters react to even the simplest of issues in an “over the top” dramatic way with outcomes that are not peaceful or productive – but can involve a lot of cursing and weave pulling! Yet, it would be difficult to convince them that their methods are not effective! Why? They receive what they value - fame, notoriety, and money. Yet, happiness, peace, and joy are not on that list of rewards because they are often not highly valued.

When we walk spiritually alive, we do not have to react in an emotionally fueled or cold calculated way that listens to our sinful urges on how to solve our issues. We have access to how to use the “spiritual filter” that filters our emotions based on God's word and helps us decide how to respond to life setting the priorities to which we are committed.



What is a Spiritual Filter?

A filter allows what is wanted to be separated from that which is unwanted.

In a typical week, we are exposed to many different types of messages, visuals, and provocations that we process consciously and subconsciously. So, understandably some of those elements subtly slip in unnoticed and influence our thinking. The spiritual filter is where we deliberately make decisions about how we will handle these inputs. As we sort our thoughts, we ask ourselves the question of whether or not this aligns to the guidance of God's word. Consider the words of Jesus in Mark 7:20-21.

*And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.
For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts..."*

Whatever comes out of our mouths, in our behaviors, and in our responses shows what is lodged deep within our hearts. How is the heart controlled? Proverbs 4:23 provides an answer. It says that the heart should be guarded because everything in life is sourced from it.

*Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it. (NIV)*

A visual might be of an armed guard checking all those messages, visuals, and provocations at the entrance of our minds. If they have the right credentials, they can enter, if they do not then the guard blocks them from coming inside. That is literally what Christians must do! We check what we are exposed to and block what is useless, so we do not waste time dwelling on it. Our best defense is multifaceted. When we start closely monitoring what we allow in, we can reduce the junk messages to which we listen. Study, write down scriptures, memorize them, and pray about them using the courage we have gained to apply what they teach. The renewed mindset is evident when what we say, do, and think makes us distinctive from the world.



Set Apart or Fitting In

Separating from sin and avoiding fitting in with the world does not refer to our physical proximity, but how closely our mindset fits in with worldly logic and reasoning. If we do not interact within society, how can we teach the gospel and show how to navigate relationships and problems in a godly way. While we live

and move within our communities, we must resist being tainted by worldly desires and goals. 1 Samuel 8 records Israel's desire to be like the world and its consequences. They wanted an earthly king to rule over them. In verses 19-20 they provide their reasoning for this...

1 Samuel 8:19-20 -

*Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel;
and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us,
that we also may be like all the nations,
and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."*

Israel wanted to be like the other nations around them and judged that having a king to go before them in battle was what they should do. In their reasoning, it seemed to be working for the neighboring nations, so it must be right and good enough for them. They preferred the rule of an earthly king over the love, protection, and provision provided by the heavenly Father!

And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them."

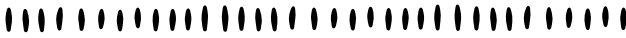
Israel ignored the consequences of rejecting God just so they could have their king. In 1 Samuel 8:11-17, Samuel lists the ways the earthly king would behave. A review of this list shows that a king would take much from them. This is so different from the transparent way God wants to love and protect us.

And so, it is with many of us today. How the world sees living the "good life" can have a stronger influence on us than staying sanctified by God's higher purpose for us. 1 Peter 3:15 teaches us to *sanctify (set apart) God in our hearts...* When God is in our minds and hearts, then we will not crave what the world offers. 1 John 2:15 reminds us not to fall in love with the world or worldly things.

*"Do not love the world or the things in the world.
If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."*

Worldly ways produce Christians who are not distinctive in living, talking, and priority setting. When we desire the recognition and acceptance of the world over the love and protection God provides, then we are loving the world more than God. Although we may not think about it this way, we are telling God that we prefer other stuff above Him. So, when we choose organizational meetings

and little league games over the set times of worship and bible study, then we are obeying worldly commitments rather than serving God. It may seem easier to occasionally plan to miss worship instead of taking a stand for Christ by disappointing associates, colleagues, friends, family, and sometimes even our kids, by making decisions to miss practices. The truth is that while it may seem easier in that moment to comply, the long-term consequences of these decisions can be far graver because we miss gospel messages and fellowships designed to build our faith. Further, these actions also teach others that we consider designated times of worship or formal bible study as optional and not critical to our spiritual health.



Winning the internal battle between the flesh and Spirit.

Paul constantly reminded first century Christians that walking according to the Spirit means deciding not to serve our flesh.

Galatians 5:16

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

There is a decision to be made on who will be served. Romans 6:19 highlights that the struggle is real!

*“For the good that I will to do, I do not do;
but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”*

Satan wages a war where the prize is control of Christians souls. We can think we want to do good, but evil is always there as an option. As sober Christians we cannot take this for granted by assuming that we always make the right choices. Like soldiers with military strategies, we must use our strategies and resources to manage the spiritual battles that we fight. This is not something that will just naturally happen. It takes our conscious effort and thoughtful choice to win the internal battles and wars. The Holy Spirit works the understanding of the truths of Scripture within us to overcome those ungodly desires. In this battle we may feel like the funny depictions we may have seen where an angel sits on one shoulder and a devil sits on the other shoulder. Both whisper their unique influential messages into the ear of a person debating an issue. The insight of this illustration is that spiritual and carnal thoughts can exist in the mind unchecked and battling each other. The battle is reducing the carnal and uplifting the spiritual thoughts!

Christians need to prepare for battle. Consider adding the following tools into your spiritual habits.

1. *Prioritize study to achieve a deeper understanding of God's word.*

Psalm 1:2 connects wisdom with knowing and meditating on God's word. Scripture must reside at the forefront of our minds.

2. *Memorize scripture.*

Psalm 119:11 encourages hiding the scripture in our hearts so that we will not sin against God. Memorizing scriptures fills our hearts with God's word and when we meditate on them, we are brought closer to spiritual maturity. At the congregation I attend, our ladies bible study class has focused on memorizing scripture for years. We are now taking this a step further by challenging ourselves to memorize entire books of the bible. The purpose is to ensure that scripture and context are ingrained in our thinking, responding, and living.

3. *Spend time in fellowship with Christians.*

This can be underrated as we contemplate our busy lives, but it can greatly influence whether we skip or slip in our spiritual walk. Building relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ can mutually enrich and encourage when we allow it. Strive to not be the kind of Christians who walk around dead in our thinking, but ones who live lives rich in the understanding and blessings of Christ.



Questions to Ponder

1. Name examples of how Christians live their lives in a way that could be called spiritually dead?

2. How do Christian standards of success differ from worldly standards?

3. How does the concept of a spiritual filter relate to Mark 7:20-21 and Proverbs 4:23?

4. How can 1 Peter 3:15 help Christians live a life of purpose?

5. Why do you think Christian's struggle with maintaining their spiritual health?
