

What's in your Toolbox for life

By Dave Batty

Have you ever dreamed of how easy life would be if we never had any problems? But reality comes crashing into that fantasy and hits us so hard, we feel the pain all day long.

Perhaps you've seen the TV commercials by Staples that show people faced with some huge problems. When catastrophe seems inevitable, they reach out and hit the big "easy button," and in an instant, the problem disappears, and life goes on ever so smoothly!



We say, "Where can I buy that button? That's what I need in my life today!"

Our culture feeds the false belief that life should be easy and pain free. Success is easily achieved—just buy the right car or clothes. Or use the right shampoo or hair color.

- ❖ **What are the tools you need for success in your life?**
- ❖ **How does one become effective at overcoming temptations to sin?**
- ❖ **What place do miracles and God's power have in overcoming problems?**

Even when you enter a church service, you can easily be led into magical thinking—if you ask Jesus to come into your life—everything will get better.

Chuck Colson, a key leader in President Nixon's administration, came to a crisis in his life as a result of his part in the Watergate scandal.

In those dark hours of his life, he turned to Jesus. What happened next? Even though Jesus forgave him of all his sins, Chuck Colson still went to prison. So what's up with that?

So you need a miracle?

Maybe you have faced a huge problem and someone said, "You need a miracle in your life!"

You were quick to agree—"Jesus, please give me a miracle and take away all the hurt and hassle this problem is creating in my life."

But you heard this familiar answer from heaven—SILENCE! Why is it that other people get a miracle when they have a big problem but God does nothing when I ask for help?

Here comes reality—crashing into that fantasy—that wonderful super-spiritual fantasy! The Bible does not promise that we will get a miracle every time we pray. God

does not cause an "easy button" to appear every time we face a problem. There is no magic wand to wave that will cause our problems to disappear in an instant. However, God does promise: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5 NIV)

Reality sends the same message to us in many areas of our world.

Some are desperate for help, but then refuse the discipline of change.

When a baby is born into your family—it doesn't mature into a beautiful young adult overnight. It takes about 20 years—years filled with lots of hard work!

Bob Dunstan, Executive Director of Life Challenge, a program similar to Teen Challenge in Amarillo, Texas, commented on some of the men coming to them for help. He described them as "those who beg for help and then refuse the discipline of change."

Are you one of those who is desperate for help, but unwilling to accept the process of change—the discipline of change?

A farmer who loves God does not spend 8 hours a day 5 days a week walking through his fields praying with all his might that God will

bless him with a miracle harvest. Have you ever heard of such a farmer who comes to church at the end of the summer and stands up with a beaming smile and says, "To God be the glory! I've prayed all summer long, and this morning I woke up and my barn was full of hay, and the corn crib was overflowing with corn. It's a miracle!"

There are plenty of successful farmers who love God and pray daily. But if they are going to be a successful farmer they have to work—and it's lots of hard work—all spring and summer long. Finally at the end of summer, when the harvest is done they can see the results of all their hard work.

Tools for life

So how do we find that place of fulfillment, of success, of life to the full? We can chase every fantasy path, or we can choose God's path of reality, roll up our sleeves, and get to work. We can implement the discipline of change in our lives.

In the real world, every job requires some tools to help us achieve success. So what are the tools God wants us to use to achieve the successful life He has planned for us?

Instead of looking for a spiritual "magic wand" or the "easy button" we need to look at the tools God wants us to use to achieve success in our lives.

The Bible should not be used as our guide to magical solutions to problems. Instead we should see it as a guide to the practical tools we need to use to deal with the problems in our life. It's time to invest in a toolbox where we can put the tools that will help us on a daily basis as we live in reality—as we live out the discipline

of change in our lives.

What are these tools?

The Bible identifies many different tools, but some of the most basic are: truth, love, prayer, a thankful attitude, healthy relationships, boundaries, accountability, problem solving strategies, and many more.

The Bible speaks of tools we can use in fighting against the attacks of the devil. ¹³"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.... ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows

Instead of looking for a "magic wand" or the "easy button," we need to use God's tools to achieve success in our lives.

of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert." (Ephesians 6:13-18 New International Version)

Another list of tools we need for life is found in 2 Peter 1:3-9 which identifies the tools of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. See also Colossians 3:1-17.

Learning to use the tools

"Wait a minute," you say. This is much too general. I need something more specific." That's true. If I tell you, "Use a computer and type this letter," I am assuming you have a computer and you know how to use it. However, even if you own a computer, success is not guaranteed. If you have never in your life ever used a computer, then having the best computer in town does little to assure your success.

God has given us tools for life, that when used properly, can put us on the path to success. If you have never played golf in your life, and I give you a new set of golf clubs for Christmas, you will not be able to go out on your first day and beat Tiger Woods at a game of golf.

We must develop the skill of effectively using the tools God has provided to help us meet the challenges in our lives.

Even the right tools for the job are dangerous in the hands of someone who is not trained to use them properly. A knife or a chain saw in the hands of a child can be deadly.

The tools God has given us can be ineffective or deadly if we fail to use them properly. If we are to achieve success, we need to learn how to properly use these tools for the challenges we face each day. It's a process. It's a discipline. The skill is developed through training and use.

¹¹"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk,

not solid food! ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Hebrews 5:11,12,14 NIV)

Are we slow to learn because we are looking for the magic wand or the easy button? Verse 14 makes the point unmistakably clear—those who are mature are those “who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Two keys jump out here—“constant use” and “trained themselves.” It takes training, and it takes constant use.

That’s reality—not fantasy. Growth comes as we learn how to use the tools God has given us to face each challenge in our lives. We can make excuses, or we can get to work.

Which ones are the right tools?

Even when you become skilled at using the tools God has given you, the need is still there for you to use the appropriate tool in each life situation. If someone is trained to be a surgeon, they have learned how to use all kinds of medical equipment and tools in their work. But if we need to build a bridge, I don’t want that surgeon to bring his medical tools to the construction site. Even if he is the best surgeon in the world, his surgical tools are not what we need to construct a bridge.

And the best construction worker, skilled and experienced at building bridges, is not the one I want to do heart surgery on me. His chain saw and torches, and hammers work great on a bridge, but not on my heart! Neither would I want the surgeon to use the construction worker’s tools. I want the surgeon to use the tools designed for heart surgery.

We need to be careful to use the right tools in each life situation. We need to learn how to choose and use the right tools to achieve success.

Tools for fighting temptation

When facing temptations to sin, what are the tools you use to achieve victory over that sin? Asking others for advice can be one place to start. But then you have to develop the skill of using that tool and prove to yourself that it really works for you.

Have you ever listened to those who are experts at remembering the names of every person they meet? They have all these strategies and tools to help you achieve their level of success. But when you try to follow their advice you still can’t remember new names.

There are at least two potential problems here—“I tried it once and it didn’t work for me.” Rarely do any of us master the use of a tool the first 5 minutes we use it. It takes practice, and the help of someone who knows how to effectively use that tool.

A second potential problem is that not every person will have the same success with the same tool. No matter how much you practice, you may never achieve the success of another. It’s time to look for another tool that will help you achieve success.

In combating temptations, you need to have more than one tool. A friend who was battling sexual temptations used the following tool.

He made a list of 30 reasons why he never wanted to sin in that area again. Every morning when he got up, he would read that list of 30 reasons—out loud to himself. It helped him to stay focused on the truth and also to consider the consequences of giving in to that temptation.

Another person memorized scriptures that related to the common temptations he faced in his life. He wrote those verses on a card as well. When faced with that temptation, he would quote that verse to himself and work to put it into practice in his life

Success takes more than learning to use the tools God has provided. We also need to learn how to work with other people to achieve success.

God has not called us to be “lone rangers,” but to live in relationship with others. One soldier can’t win a war by himself.

right then. If he couldn’t remember the verse, he would take out the card and read it again.

Another young man who came out of a background of drug addiction and smoking implemented the strategy of carrying a small New Testament in his shirt pocket every day. This was the same pocket where he used to keep his cigarettes. Out of habit he would reach for that pack in his shirt pocket, and instead pull out his New Testament. He did this for 10 years, and in that time found that it really worked to keep him from going back to his old sinful ways.

We each need to find the tools

that will help us be effective in facing the challenges and temptations in our lives. We need to stop looking for the magic wands and easy buttons, and instead look to God's truth as the source of our help.

God's power

But the tools by themselves are not the key to our success. We also need to understand the power of God, and the role His power will have in helping us master the discipline of change in our lives. Paul talked about the overwhelming problems he faced in his life.

⁸“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.” (2 Corinthians 1:8-10 NIV)

We need more than God's tools to help us deal with the challenges of every day living—we also need His wisdom and His power. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, God promises that His power is available to help us in our areas of weakness. When we are weak, and ask for His help, His power will give us the strength we need to lift up His magic wand and make the problem disappear? No! His power will help us find the “easy button” and press it? No! His power will help us successfully implement the discipline of change in our lives and experience real success in overcoming temptations.

As we develop the skill of using the tools God has given us for successful living, and as we rely on His power to help us, we will live in His freedom.

What's in your toolbox for life?

Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Can you think of some areas in your life where you have been caught up in magical thinking, wishing you had a magic wand or an “easy button” to solve your problems?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-10. Have there been times when you have felt so overwhelmed that you were ready to give up? If so, how can you relate to the lessons Paul learned from these problems?
3. How often in church do you hear people use magical thinking as their approach to solving problems?
4. Read Hebrews 5:11-14.
 - A. What is the evidence that a person is not learning the lessons God wants them to learn?
 - B. Verse 14 talks about mature people as those “who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Can you think of examples in your life where you have trained yourself to distinguish good from evil?
5. What are some specific strategies that you have used to overcome temptations in your life?
6. Read Leviticus 26:8 and Deuteronomy 32:30.
 - A. What is God's principle of help in these scriptures?
 - B. What is one area in your life where the help of others has strengthened you?
 - C. What are the fears that cause you to be reluctant to reach out to others for help with your struggles?
 - D. Who will you reach out to for help with one of the struggles in your life?



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