

Resist the Devil • James 4:7

He was thirty-three years old, and he wanted to please God 100%. When he sensed the tug of the Spirit on his heart he followed that tug. He left the town in which he lived and went to a primitive place where no one else lived. You could call it a camping trip except he took no gear or food or water. It was a risky place to go alone, but I doubt that he thought about the risks. All he thought about was that this was a great opportunity to be alone and experience God.

Have you ever gone away to be alone with God, to escape the busyness of life and the pressures of people? It can be a life-changing experience. I've tried it. Not for a month, but once for a week.

He tried something long-term that I've tried, but not to the extent that he did. Fasting. Not eating. Every time I've fasted I've gotten a headache. I can hardly imagine fasting for nearly six weeks. But that's what he did. They say that fasting increases your sensitivity — that all of life is seen more clearly and that the soul is more open to directly experience God.

After a month and ten days it ended quite different from what he had anticipated. Instead of feeling wonderfully satisfied, he was very hungry. Instead of encountering God, he met the devil. Really! He actually met the devil face to face. And he was very vulnerable.

The devil knew he was starved so he offered him some fresh loaves of bread. All he had to do was say the word and they were his to eat. The offer sounded so good to the hungry man. But he decided he would rather starve to death than eat bread served on Satan's platter.

So Satan quickly changed his strategy. He took him to the highest scenic point in the nearby town and told him to jump. He was not suggesting suicide. The devil assured him with supernatural information that God would actually send angels to float him to the ground without a bruise. It was a tempting offer because it would put him back with people after so long alone. And it would get the devil off his back. Plus, it would be wonderful to have a miracle

from God. That's what he had gone on his retreat to experience in the first place. Frankly, he seriously thought about it, but he decided to decline. He concluded that the last thing he should do was jump when Satan told him to jump, even if jumping seemed like a good thing to do.

Having received another refusal, the devil tried a third tactic. This time Satan scooped him from the city and flew him to the top of a very high mountain. It was a clear day and it seemed as if they could see forever. This time the devil made an offer any truly good person might seriously consider. Satan offered to step down from his evil rule of earth and turn the whole world over to him. If he said "yes", there would be no more evil plots to destroy human lives, there would be no more sin spread like a dense fog to obscure all human vision and there would be

no more organized opposition to the rule of God on earth. Satan actually offered to abdicate his evil throne and give it to this very good man who would be a very good king. But one more time he said "no". As much as he may have wanted to accept, he figured that Satan

had a scheme to turn good back to evil all over again. The smartest thing he could do was to refuse and send the devil packing. And that's exactly what he did.

I would have thought Satan would have kept trying, but he gave up and quit — and the winner of this true story was Jesus! Jesus was greatly pressured and genuinely tempted by a slick and evil enemy who wanted to destroy him forever.

When the devil realized he couldn't defeat Jesus, he switched his attention to us. We look a lot easier to tempt and trick. And he doesn't have to wait for us to take a trip or fast. There's open season on us all the time.

What are our chances against such a smart and powerful enemy? The truth is that our chances are very good. According to James 4:7, what worked for Jesus will equally work for us: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

The first step in any successful battle is to iden-

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tify our enemy. The Bible says in I Peter 5:8, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Fifty-five percent of Americans say they believe in Satan. That means that 45% don’t think Satan is real. What a fabulously successful strategy to have an enemy that is convinced that you are not an enemy at all.

The Bible’s teaching about the devil is really quite clear. First, Satan is real. The devil is no literary illusion or symbol of evil. Satan is as real as God or you or I. Also, Satan is a person. He has intelligence, feelings and a very strong will. He thinks and acts and has a personality, just like every one of us. And, Satan is evil. He is not a mixture of good and bad. He is 100% bad. Even though he may sometimes appear good and reasonable, that is just a slick cover-up for the highest concentration of evil in any one person anywhere at any time. He is as bad as he can be. He is as mean as they come.

The Bible also teaches that Satan is supernatural. The devil has intelligence that is greater than genius and power that is super-human. He is fully capable of out-thinking us on any topic and overpowering us in any way. We humans are no match for him. It is absolutely frightening to think of such great power and such great evil combined in one person!

But the Bible also explains that Satan is not God! Unfortunately, too many people mistakenly think that because of his reality, because of his personality, because of his evil and because of his power Satan is the evil equivalent of God himself. They think that Satan knows everything that is going on, including our private thoughts. Satan does not know everything. Only God knows everything. And they think that Satan can be in more than one place at the same time. He cannot. Only God is omni-present. While Satan is powerful, he is not divine. If he is in India, he is not in Indiana. If he is in Indianapolis, he is not in Minneapolis. Anyone who says that Satan is personally and directly harassing her implies that she has been especially chosen out of 5.5 billion people for special satanic attention.

Compare Satan to another evil leader — Adolph Hitler. Hitler was truly a man of great evil power and influence. He controlled the minds and the lives and the destinies of millions of people. He worked through others who agreed to obey him and to implement his will.

I have walked through the concentration camps at Dacau in Germany and Auschwitz in Poland. I don’t know if Hitler ever set foot in either place, but it really doesn’t matter. His evil influence was there. His will was carried out in the horrors inflicted on millions of victims.

When we identify Satan as our enemy, let us neither under-estimate nor over-estimate him. He is a great and terrible adversary who cannot be ignored and who impacts our lives every day. But he is not God or God’s evil equal. He can be resisted and he can be chased away.

The Greek name for Satan is Diablos which means “to malign, slander, accuse”. The strategy of this great enemy of ours is to constantly place us in situations and positions where he can accuse us and separate us from God. He has many strategies, but none that is more effective than those that center on human pride. Pride is having an exaggerated view of oneself. We think we are better and more important than we really are. We believe we are as good or better than God. Pride is the conviction that we can successfully live life without God.

High on Satan’s list of specific tactics used to separate us from God is wounded pride. That happens when we are put down, when we don’t get our own way, when we don’t look as good as we want to look in front of other people. Wounded pride destroys marriages, generates lawsuits, finishes friendships, destroys careers and separates people from God. Like wounded animals our wounded pride is dangerous and unpredictably vicious. There is no time when we are more spiritually vulnerable than when we harbor hurt feelings.

Next on the list is self-pity. Self-pity is all consuming. We fret because we don’t have what others have. We think that everything goes wrong for us and we don’t deserve it. Others seem to be so much happier, so much better off. We feel we don’t have the possessions we need to make us happy. We don’t have any friends. This is a miserable place. No one loves us.

Self-pity not only digs us into holes of discouragement and depression; it alienates us from other people and, most of all, from God. In many cases, the more we have the harder we take disappointments. People with easy lives and great successes often handle problems poorly. Self-pity, in a sense, is pride that has just gone wild.

Self-centeredness is pretty much the same. It sees

everything in terms of me. It is as if I am at the center of every room. I am more important than anyone else. What happens to me is more important than what happens to others.

Self-centeredness is the ultimate insult to others and especially to God. The proud self-centered person insists on the central place that rightfully belongs to God alone.

We need to understand that when life's circumstances tempt us toward pride — either to self-importance or to self-pity — it is then that we are highly vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. If we do not resist we will be controlled, if not consumed, by our evil enemy.

What we need to do is resist, and we need to plan it in advance, because if we properly resist the devil, God promises that the devil will flee from us.

There are two primary means to resist the devil. They are supernaturally powerful and amazingly simple. They are so simple that 50% of us are likely to dismiss them as inadequate and return to our problems as usual.

Number one is to use the resources found in the Bible. When Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan he answered every attack with a quote from the Bible. The Bible is God's Word and it works to resist the devil.

Daily reading and memorization of the Bible gives us the weapons we need to chase evil away. It works whether we are battling self-pity, pornography, addiction, loneliness, illness, greed, discouragement or any other tactic of the devil. To try to live in today's world without the Bible and without remembering and quoting it in the face of temptation is like an NFL lineman going into a game without a helmet or pads. It is an invitation to injury.

So here is some very practical advice. Read the Bible every day. Remember what it says. Use God's Word to resist the devil.

The second great resource the Bible tells us about is prayer. Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help

us in our time of need.

God explains that through prayer we can have the resources of God to resist the devil. God promises to give us what we need when we need it.

But this doesn't just apply to private prayer. The Bible says that the effectiveness of prayer may be increased when we pray together with others. One of God's greatest resources is also the most underused — group prayer. It is amazing that we have so many problems in our lives yet we never join small groups of Christians to pray or participate in group prayer sessions within the church. It seems we would rather have our problems than God's power to resist.

One of the great national sports pastimes in America is football. From coast to coast and border to border NFL teams enter fierce football competition before crowds of tens of thousands of people. Before each game the coach stands up in the locker room and tells the players how important the game

is and how strong an opposition they will face. The coach gives advice and encouragement to help his team resist the other team's offense and send them running in the opposite direction. It seems very important.

Far more important are the spiritual battles that each

of us enter day after day. This is our locker room gathering. I am not the coach, but I relate to you the message of the coach. He says that the way we live is more important than any NFL or Super Bowl game. The enemy we face is a million times stronger and smarter than any NFL line.

The coach is Jesus Christ himself. The enemy is Satan, and his offensive line is huge. Jesus Christ our Savior, Lord and coach says to us: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you!"

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