

Cf. Using pots and stick to ward off evil spirits/ghost

We're concluding this series called Pray Like Jesus and have been unpacking the Lord's Prayer together and looking at how Jesus teaches us through this prayer, how to pray in line with God's will and his purposes.

We continue this morning to look at the last petition:

Matt. 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

This is the most appropriate petition because, if we truly want to align our lives with God's will, to manifest His character and trust in His goodness, we will face character forming and faith opposition from all sides.

Satan came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness at the start of His public ministry but failed. But Luke recorded this:

"When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came." (Lk. 4:13)

Satan is an opportunist; our enemy will take every opportunity to attack God's people and frustrate His plans.

There are three possibilities in understanding spiritual warfare:

(1) we are doing something God-honouring thus being opposed by the power of darkness,

(2) we are not doing something God-honouring thus being disciplined or reminded to draw closer to God, or

(3) Satan is just attacking God's people.

After all said and done, it's most likely a mixture of all of the above.

Satan is most pleased when we are complacent, haphazard, distracted, or defiant in our relationship with God. He wouldn't border us if we don't consider that he is a threat.

Opposition is a fact: the Christian who is not conscious of being opposed had better watch himself for he is in danger.

J. I. Packer

I would like to use James' teaching as the outline to explore how we can overcome the evil one and confidently handle spiritual warfare:

"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world." (James 4:7-8)

And the message of James is this:

**When we take a stand against the devil, then he'll
flee from you – don't be intimidated or back down!**¹

So here is the first component of this resistance James teaches:

Know who and what you are up against.

We wouldn't know how to resist, if we don't know who or what is against us!

But here James teaches that we can fight the good fight of faith with confidence, because we know who our enemy is, the devil.

Spiritual discernment is an integral part of Christian responsibility; a clear understanding of Satan's schemes enables Christ-followers to develop a winning strategy to combat Satan's subversive and diabolic schemes.

If we don't have a clear understanding of our enemies' ways and means, we are simply engaging in this war, fighting like kamikaze pilots and committing to spiritual suicide!

¹ Paul's message to the Ephesians is the same: "Stand firm against all strategies of the devil, to fight against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:10-13).

In the same way Paul tells the Corinthian believers to be aware of Satan's schemes so they might not be outmanoeuvred by Satan.²

So let's take a quick look at some descriptions of Satan found in the NT:

Matt. 4:3 "a Tempter"

Matt. 13:38, 39 "the Evil One" / "an Enemy"

Jn. 8:44 "Father of Lies" / "Murderer"

2 Cor. 4:4 "the god of this world"

2 Cor. 11:14 "disguised as an angel of light"

Eph. 2:2 "the prince of the power of the air"

Eph. 6:12 "the rulers of the darkness of this age"

1 Pe. 5:8 "a roaring lion"

Rev. 12:9,10 "a Deceiver" / "an Accuser"

Sinister, creepy, threatening, sly, intimidating, and evil are appropriate adjectives to describe the character of Satan.

This would be Satan's mission statement:

² 2Cor. 2:11 "...in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes".

My mission is to discourage, demoralize, deceive, derail, disrupt, & destroy God's people – any time, any ways, anywhere, I possibly can.

Satan is focused and he's determined to inflict as much harm as possible upon God's people.³

But we praise God because when we read the Gospels, we see that "power Encounters" between Jesus and the Devil or forces of darkness are one of the most significant aspects of His ministry.

In the ministry, miracles, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus we see that God himself is actively engaging in spiritual warfare - Jesus is God's invasion of Satan's territory.

The good news of the gospel is about deliverance from the grip of sin, evil, and death.

Listen to what Paul and John say:

³ Satan's attacks can be seen in the following ways and arenas:

1 Thess. 3:5 Temptations

Eph. 4:26-27 Any sin/Immorality (gives a foothold to the devil)

2 Cor. 12:7 Physical Afflictions/Suffering

1Tim. 3:1-7 Attack on Christian Leadership

2 Cor. 2:5-11 Interpersonal Conflicts/Disunity

1 Cor. 7:5; 1Tim. 5:14-15 Family

1 Thess. 2:18 Ministry/Missions

2 Cor. 11:14; Deceptions/False Teachings cf. 2 Thess. 2:9

"For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves ..."
(Col. 1:13)

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work ..." (1 Jn. 3:8)

As Christ-followers who are redeemed and belonging to God's kingdom, we are under His protection and have full confidence in the defeat of the power of darkness.⁴

I know from pastoral experience and counselling that physical hurt, emotional trauma, and spiritual oppression caused by Satan are real; but Christ's authority and power overcomes all threats.

[If time permits, share one experience of God's power when praying with someone in my office.]

This brings us to our 2nd component of the resistance movement:

Draw close to God.

⁴ "In early Christianity, the view of mission envisioned a triumphal war against Satan and the powers of evil, and so Christians employed spiritual warfare as the frontline tactics of its mission. Exorcisms, healings, and displays of supernatural power went side-by-side with the gospel message. Not only was the salvation of individuals a wonderful thing for the individuals themselves, it was a blow against the enemy, whose kingdom of darkness was shrinking with every new convert that was transferred into the kingdom of light ... The mission of the church was ... making Christ's triumph over Satan an experienced reality in the world around them." (Burden, Matthew. *Missionary Motivations* (p. 116). William Carey Publishing. Kindle Edition.)

“Come close to God, and God will come close to you.”
(James 4:8)

When we are in the Light, there’s no darkness at all – we are not fleeing from Satan but he from us.⁵

Resist the devil by embracing God.

This is what I wrote when I was journaling about this passage:

“This act of embrace – coming near to Him – shows a spirit of humility and love for God! In the bosom of His embrace, i.e., when we respond and make space for Him, His love brings warmth, contentment, and joy – fulfilling His will and instructions flows out of our experience of love ... Thus it’s not about sin management and an ethics of avoidance, but a deepening friendship that reveals in oneness in purpose and will to bring out the best in every act so that God will be honoured and community built up for good! The coming near to God is the fleeing from the devil.”

One practical and significant step to draw close to God is this: **Get Connected with Group Life.**

“Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.” (Col. 3:16)

⁵ Cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-5.

We need other believers to encourage and help us to grow in our faith with Jesus! When we are “hot” together for Jesus, Satan will not dare to come close!

The man who seeks God in isolation from his fellows is likely to find, not God, but the devil, who will bear an embarrassing resemblance to himself.

R. H. Tawney

Check out Cornerstone web page for more info about joining a small group:

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/smallgroups/>

Here is another practical suggestion to draw close to God: **Become a Prayer Warrior.**

“Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.” (Eph. 6:18)

Philip Yancey writes: “Prayer sets God loose. As we revolt against the world’s disorder in our actions and in our prayers, refusing to resign ourselves to evil ... Persistent temptation had compelled persistent prayer ... Prayer offers an opportunity for God to remodel us...”⁶

For prayer resources: <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer/>

⁶ Philip Yancey, *Prayer*, pp. 150, 154.

The next component in resisting the devil is ...

Confess and repent.

“Wash your hands, you sinners ...” (James 4:8)

Washing our hands is a ceremonial cleaning signifying our decision to stop sinning and realign our life with God’s purpose and will: **Get rid of dirt and come clean – confess and repent.**

Paul’s words are instructive:

“Don’t sin by letting anger control you. Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.” (Eph. 5:26-27)

You can replace anger with any other “sins” and the principle remains the same: like rats are drawn to the trashes, forces of darkness are drawn to the “trashes” in our lives!

When our desires or yearnings are congruent with Satan’s sinister intentions and purpose, we are practically opening the door and invite the wolf into the henhouse to have a feast!

So the petition of asking for forgiveness is crucial: we must come back to God and allow God’s truth to cleanse us so that we could live in the light, following the Way, the Truth, and the Life!

And that’s why James immediately connects confession with the purity of our hearts – the 4th component - which is critical for resisting the devil:

Purify your heart.

“... purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.” (James 4:8 NLT)

Here in the context of James 4 where James warns against "double-mindedness" - against being a friend of the world, thus making oneself being an enemy of God (4:4).

19th century Danish Christian philosopher Sören Kierkegaard says, **“Purity of heart is to will one thing.”**

Single-mindedness, absolute commitment and pure allegiance, provides security and confidence to stand firm against Satan’s schemes and temptations.

The devil doesn’t create the bad as much as the devil edits the good ... a skilful gift giver who knows what we want when we most want it ... the devil has great timing ... tempts us with power, authority, and vainglory when we’re at our hungriest and loneliest. He’s quite the gift giver.

A.J. Swoboda

It would not be farfetched to suggest that James remembers Jesus’ teaching in Matthew:

“God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.” (Matt. 5:8)

“For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.” (Matt. 15:19)

We do need a “renovation of the heart” so that we will remain faithful and loyal to Jesus, to allow His word to transform our minds, hearts, wills, words, and behaviours!

As Jesus-followers we are involved in the battle with evil and the evil one; we are in God’s resistance movement and His warriors!

The battleline between good and evil runs through the heart of every man.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Let us prepare ourselves for Satan’s attack and be mindful of the fact that we are always in war-footings. Remember these key components in resisting the devil:

Know who and what we are up against.

Draw close to God.

Confess and repent.

Purify your heart

May the Psalmist’s words be our prayer each day:

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” (Ps. 19:8)