

“RESISTING THE DEVIL”

“Keeping the Faith When Times Get Tough,” part 11

A sermon based on 1 Peter 5:8-14

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An older British man and his daughter, who was visiting from out of town, are found unconscious on a park bench. They're rushed to the hospital where it's discovered that they'd been poisoned with a deadly nerve agent. Thankfully they were rushed to a hospital and were successfully treated and survived.

4 months later a middle aged man finds a small bottle of expensive perfume in a garbage dumpster. He picks it up and gives it to his girlfriend as a gift. She sprays a little on her wrist and immediately gets sick and dies.

It turns out that the older man who was originally poisoned was a Russian spy who worked as a double agent for British intelligence for many years. He retired in England. But years later, 2 Russian KGB agents came after him. They put a toxic poison on the door handle of his home. Both he and his daughter touched it and later became sick on the park bench. They both survived and are now in the British version of a “witness protection program” where they've been moved to a new location and given new identities.

The perfume bottle that the 2 Russian agents used to poison the door handle was discarded and ended up in a dumpster. Another man eventually found it and gave it to his girlfriend who died after she sprayed it on her wrist.

So one person died and 2 people nearly died and the whole thing created an international incident between Britain and Russia. And what caused it all? Someone high in the Russian government, possibly Vladimir Putin himself, ordered 2 secret agents to go to England and kill their former spy who'd turned against them.

In other words, behind it all was a person who was trying to hunt down and kill someone else. But if you didn't know the truth behind it all, you'd assume that the people in this story just strangely fell ill and one died. But there was more going on behind the scenes!

According to the Apostle Peter in our text, we are all in a similar situation. 1. We have a **spiritual** enemy who's out to get us.

He says in **verse 8**: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8b, NIV84)

In other words,

- when we look with envy at something our neighbor has,
- or we're tempted to view pornography,
- or when we're filled with anger and rage about something

– it might not just be something random happening to us. There might be someone behind it who's actively trying to destroy us.

The Apostle Paul writes in **Ephesians 6:12** “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12, NIV84)

In our text Peter calls him our enemy “**the devil.**” The Bible describes “the devil” as a **liar and deceiver**. In fact, Jesus calls him “the father of lies.” He's an expert at twisting the truth and getting us to believe

- lies about God,
- lies about other people,
- and lies about ourselves.

He deceives us into thinking that we're right and everyone else is wrong. And he's so good at deceiving that pretty soon he has whole groups of people calling what is evil “good” and calling what is good “evil.”

Which raises the question, how is the devil actively trying to deceive me? What lies have I believed about God, myself or others? And how can I discover and know the truth that's found in Scripture? The less time we spend in the Bible, the more likely we are to be led astray.

But the devil is not only a deceiver, he's also a **tempter**. He's an expert at

“sugar-coating” sin and making it look attractive to us. He knows our weaknesses and he knows how to exploit them. And so the temptations that come our way are tailor-made to successfully get us to sin.

Peter experienced this personally. Just before Jesus was crucified, the devil successfully tempted him to deny knowing Jesus 3 times!

The devil is our sworn enemy and he’s doing his best to steal, kill and destroy. He’s our accuser who condemns us when we sin. And he does his best to “hold our sins against us” so that we don’t live in the glorious truth of God’s grace and forgiveness.

So clearly, we have a spiritual enemy who’s out to get us. Peter says that 2. He’s like a **roaring** lion and he’s looking for people to devour.

When I lived in Nigeria for a summer as a seminary student, I’ll never forget our first night in Jos. All night long we could hear lions roaring in the distance! We thought we were on the edge of some wilderness area where wild lions roamed! Well, it turned out that we weren’t that far from the zoo and roars were from zoo lions in their cages!

But the roar of a lion at night is still very intimidating!

Lions aren’t very fast, so they stalk their prey. They hide in long grass and try to get as close as possible before attacking. And if they can get a whole herd of wildebeests running, they often focus on the very young or the very old. And once they’re separated from the rest of their herd, the lions quickly kill them and devour them.

Satan uses some of the same tactics. He tries to stay hidden so that we don’t know he’s there. And then he quickly tries to overwhelm us, because he knows that if we can outlast him, he’ll probably lose the battle.

Martin Luther describes Satan like this: “For still our ancient foe does seek to work us woe; his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.”

So 3. What can we do?

We have this powerful enemy named Satan who is out to get us. He knows our weaknesses and frailties and is constantly trying to tempt us to sin. And when we do sin, he clobbers us with condemnation, guilt and shame. And he does his best to fill our minds with lies so that we live our lives in a spiritual fog and can’t live whole-heartedly for the Lord!

According to Peter, we must **Resist** him.

So we have to be aware of what’s happening. We have to know that we’re being attacked. And we have to actively stand against those attacks and resist giving in to them.

Resisting isn’t just a one-time thing. It often requires a sustained effort on our part. We’ve got to outlast the attack. We must refuse to give in until he finally gives up on us and looks for a more opportune time.

The Apostle James seems to agree with this strategy when he writes: “*So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” (James 4:7, NLT)

If we can figure out a way to resist him long enough, the temptation will pass and we will win.

The other strategy Peter gives us here to defeat the devil in our lives is to Stand firm in the **faith**.

It’s a word picture of us standing on a firm foundation. And what is that foundation? It’s “the faith.” It’s the truth that we find in Scripture. It’s

- knowing the truth,
- loving the truth,
- living in the truth
- and standing on the truth.

Because the Bible says that the truth will set us free. We’re a whole lot less likely to fall for the devil’s schemes when we know the truth.

- We know that giving in to that temptation isn’t going to lead to anything good.
- We know that it’s all a lie designed to deceive us.
- And we know that it’s only as we love and walk with the Lord that we find life and joy and purpose.
- We know that God is good and that by obeying Him we’ll be happier than if we don’t.

And we need to remember these things and remind ourselves of them – so that when we feel tempted, we can stand strong in our faith and resist the lies of the evil one.

The Apostle Paul uses this same image of standing firm in our faith in **Ephesians 6:13-14**: “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,” (Ephesians 6:13–14, NIV84)

Our goal is not to be bowled over by the devil, but to stand our ground.

Then in **verse 8**, Peter also adds that we should Be **self-controlled**.

For it’s when we don’t control our anger, our desires, and our mouths that we get into trouble.

I had it on Friday where I was incredibly frustrated. So I drafted a very angry e-mail. It was basically a rant and it clearly reflected how angry and frustrated I was! But just before I sent it, it’s as if God nudged me to get up and see if I could talk to someone about it. And I found one of the very people who I was sending it to right here at church. So I shared by concern in person – which is always much wiser than trying to do it over e-mail – and the situation got resolved and I deleted my email.

Now I can’t claim that I exercised amazing self-control because I was ready let people have it in my e-mail! But God intervened and the situation got resolved without me sending an angry e-mail.

The virtue of controlling our minds, our tongues and our desires keeps us from doing what we feel like doing and the outcome is almost always better than if we give in to our urges and desires.

The Apostle Paul writes in **1 Thessalonians 5**: “So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.” (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8, NLT)

But **Peter** adds another word also in **verse 8**. He writes: “Be self-controlled and alert.”

So we also are called to Be **alert**.

This is what the animals do in Africa. They’re always alert, watching the brush and looking into the distance so that they can spot a lion before it attacks.

And this is what we need to do too. We need to be on the lookout because Satan is out there ready to tempt and attack us. We need to be ready for him! We need to be vigilant and prepared!

But we want to **keep our eyes fixed on Jesus**. Our focus is always on Christ and his kingdom! We only focus on Satan when we need to. Otherwise we give him too much attention. And we forget that our purpose is to love and serve the Lord.

And then in **verse 9**, **Peter** reminds us that **we’re not alone**. We need to Know that we’re not **alone**.

Sometimes we think that we’re the only ones who experience temptation and condemnation – but we’re not. Satan uses these same tactics on everyone.

Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 10:13** “The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.” (1 Corinthians 10:13, NLT)

So we need to support and encourage each other, because we all experience temptations and spiritual attacks at times. And we can’t allow them to defeat us or discourage us.

But the support we receive from each other is no match for what God can do for us! So Peter ends this section with a **beautiful benediction** in **verses 10&11**: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:10–11, NIV84)

So 4. God will **restore**, strengthen and establish us.

- He will restore us as he heals our wounds and makes right what is wrong. For He is the God who is making all things new!
 - He give us the strength that we need to face the devil and win.
 - And He establishes us in the truth so that we have a firm foundation to stand on.
- God in His grace, does most of the work for us.
- He helps us in our time of need.
 - He keeps us from being tempted beyond what we can bear.
 - And He graciously uses even our defeats for our good, so that we grow in our faith and in our ability to trust Him.

So be alert friends. We have a powerful spiritual enemy who’s out to get us. He’s smart and has thousands

of years of experience in knowing how to attack and defeat people like us. But he's no match for God!

- God helps us resist him!
- He helps us grow in our ability to control our thoughts and desires and actions.
- He helps us stand firm in our faith.
- And He promises to forgive us when we fail and restore us to be the kind of people He made us to be.

Prayer