

3 Sure-Fire Tactics for Ripping Up the Devil's Playbook

Not long ago a church group invited me to speak on a two-part series during a study of spiritual warfare. To begin, I shared about the dueling plans of Satan versus God and how the devil whispers lies and accusations to keep you out of God's abundant life. When I returned for the second session, a lady approached me to share a story that nearly brought me to tears.

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"I had an addiction," she immediately confessed, "an addiction to alcohol." She was sure to tell me that her drinking didn't include hard liquor, which is why it was a bit more justifiable to her. "I was a wine connoisseur," she said. "I very much enjoyed sophisticated red wine ... every day." Her enjoyment didn't consist of a couple sips or even a glass, but she consumed a bottle a day. Really, she admitted, the bottle was consuming her. Her addiction cost her about \$10 to \$20 per day. When she would realize how much she was spending, she'd go down in price, maybe to \$6 a bottle but would eventually return to the higher-priced wines, thinking she deserved it.

When her church group began to study spiritual warfare, she decided to put the wine down. As she spoke to me, she was beaming that she hadn't picked up a bottle in two weeks. Of course, she was beginning to save a considerable amount of money, and she even lost 10 pounds!

“It was like I saw behind the scenes of how Satan works,” she reported. The message awakened her to Satan’s common attacks, and she finally became aware of how he was using the addiction in her life to beat her down and make her feel unworthy. Recognizing the works of the enemy set her free!

This lady’s testimony impassioned me to expose Satan’s ways. Now, some people argue that we shouldn’t give too much attention to the devil’s work, because we might lose our focus on the goodness of God. Though that can be true, remember that Paul instructed us to at least be familiar with Satan’s schemes, so that he should not “take advantage of us. For we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11, MEV), or as it says in The New Living Translation so “Satan will not outsmart us.”

I don’t want to obsess, but I simply want to bring awareness of the devil’s common tactics so that you may be able to recognize and ward off his attacks when they happen. Satan isn’t stupid, nor is he weak, but he is predictable. If you look around at those who would say that they are under attack, more often than not the attacks begin in one place and can be put into one of only a few categories. This is what I call his playbook.

A playbook is a notebook containing outlines and plans for certain situations. It may be best known in the world of sports, such as football, where common techniques and vocabulary relating to game plays and team formations are kept and studied. Satan’s playbook contains the usual tactics he uses to achieve his ends, which we know is to steal and to kill and to destroy (John 10:10).

The Devil’s Playground

We must first understand that the most common place Satan makes his starting play is in the mind. This is why it’s said that the mind is the devil’s playground. He has the most fun

tinkering with your thoughts because he knows that your thoughts are the forerunners to your actions. Because of this, the Bible frequently reminds us, “More than anything you guard, protect your mind, for life flows from it” (Prov. 4:23, CEB).

Other translations say that the mind is the place from which your issues arise (KJV). Isn’t this the truth! Most of the issues you face stem from what you think about. Thoughts have the power to lead you into temptation or hold you captive to things such as hopelessness or depression.

The lady in the story on the previous page kept returning to the wine bottle because she kept her mind on the taste and experience of drinking wine. A man who keeps lust on his mind eventually will fall into sexual sin. A teenage girl who constantly compares herself to the airbrushed magazine models will always feel as if she isn’t good enough. This is what the Bible teaches—that we live according to our flesh when our minds are set on things of the flesh. Romans 8:5-6 says, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Where the mind goes, the person follows. Whatever you feel—confident or insecure, loved or unloved, hopeful or hopeless—it’s likely a result of your thoughts. Satan knows this, which is why he likes to use our minds as his garbage dump to inject his stinkin’ thinkin’. That’s why Paul says, “We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5, NLT).

Now that we know where Satan primarily operates, let’s expose his top three tactics—those plays from his playbook that he uses most often.

Play #1: Speak Lies

The Bible says, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9), and that's certainly true of Satan's attacks. Jesus revealed the devil has used the same tricks since Creation: "He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

Everything the devil speaks is a lie, for he is the father of lies. A lie is simply an untrue statement with the intent to *deceive*. And deception takes place in the mind, which is where we said most of Satan's attacks begin.

Recall again the story of Adam and Eve, which is the story Jesus was likely referring to when he called Satan a murderer and liar from the beginning. Satan had already been kicked out of heaven and was awaiting his opportunity to deceive. When he approached Eve, he came with a dose of doubt. "*Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?*"

Eve knew God's words and responded accordingly. Satan's next tactic was a bold-faced lie. He said, "*You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Gen. 3:1-5, emphasis added).

At this point you can imagine that Eve's mind began to spin. "Maybe God is holding back from me. Can I really trust God? Does He really love me?"

Has your mind ever run down a similar rabbit trail? I know mine has. I often talk to people who are held back from all that God has for them simply because of the devil's lies. A lady who suffered from traumatic back injury and pain once confessed to me that for years she resisted going forward in church to have hands laid on her for healing because she didn't think she was good enough. In fact, she thought there

were other, more serious issues for God to take care of first. She basically believed that God had a limited supply of miracles, and she didn't want to use one for herself in case someone else needed it more. This lie held her back. The truth is that God's love and compassion toward you never run dry. He has enough for you and everyone else on this planet (see Lam. 2:22-24).

You can trust God to see you through any challenge life throws at you. His love never ceases toward you. He's not holding back any good thing from you (Ps. 84:11). If you haven't yet received what you're praying for, it's because God is working on something better. In fact, as you read this, the Lord is whipping up a brand-new batch of love, compassion, hope and healing—*just for you*.

Satan wants you to doubt all of this, which is why lies are the first tactics in his playbook. Lies are his scheme to keep you from all that God has for you.

Play #2: Overwhelm With Guilt and Shame

Satan penetrated the hearts of Adam and Eve with a lie. They possessed knowledge of good *and* evil and an awareness of their immorality, which is why they suddenly saw themselves naked and hid from God. What the first couple experienced was the first guilt and shame.

Guilt and shame are very similar; each is rooted in the feeling that you've done something wrong, yet there are important distinctions. Guilt is always felt first. It's the immediate voice: "I have done something wrong." An initial feeling of guilt isn't always wrong. Perhaps it's part of the Spirit's conviction, which is often necessary for repentance. But it becomes crippling if it persists after you've repented. And persistent, unchecked guilt eventually turns into shame. It's the devil's follow-up tactic, and it's very potent. Whereas guilt says, "*I have done something wrong*," shame says,

"I am something wrong." Shame is the identification with the devil's lie: "I am unworthy; I am dirty; I am alone; I am unloved; I am hopeless."

Certainly guilt and shame are the devil's logical next steps after he's tempted you into sin. But other times it's not a result of anything you did wrong, but of the circumstances he's put you in.

For example, in my elementary-school years I was extremely shy, almost debilitatingly so. My timidity affected my schoolwork, but it also severely inhibited my ability to make friends or excel at much of anything. I was misunderstood by most of my classmates and became an outcast at school. Things that most kids live for, such as recess and PE class, I dreaded every day. It was embarrassing to have no one to play with on the playground or to be picked last for the team.

I tried to hide the fact that I was an outcast. When we'd have class parties or parent days, I'd never tell my mom or dad, hoping they wouldn't show up. I remember them feeling hurt because they thought I was ashamed of them. The truth was that I was ashamed of myself. I never wanted them to see me with no friends, in such a pitiful place. *"Why am I so shy? Why does no one want to be my friend? Why can't I kick the ball as well? It must be because I am something wrong,"* I thought.

As time went on, like Adam and Eve, I tried to cover up my shame with a variety of my own fig leaves, including overachieving, perfectionism, maintaining only distant relationships and avoiding certain types of situations. The devil set me up to be shackled by shame so that I couldn't experience the free life that Jesus died to give.

Play #3: Steal Their Identity

The U.S. government cites stolen identities as one of the top consumer complaints every year. According to a study done by Javelin Strategy and Research, more than 12 million people

were victims of this crime in 2012.

But the rate of identity theft is much higher than the U.S. government reports. In fact, most people I know have suffered from a stolen identity at one point in their life—spiritually speaking. Identity theft was first Satan's idea and is his greatest scheme! It's the goal of his lies and shame. Instead of you seeing yourself in God's image, Satan wants you to see yourself in the image of your problems, struggles or others' opinions. Then he'll come in with whispers questioning your status before God. The devil wants you to be identified by his whispers instead of what God says about you.

Job is a biblical example of someone who felt the tension between God's words and Satan's whispers. Job's identity is revealed as a man who was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). The story then enters a heavenly courtroom scene where Job's identity is questioned. Here, Satan appears before the Lord, probably to make his usual accusations. Then God brings Satan's attention to Job. "Have you considered my servant Job?" God appears to brag. "There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil" (v. 8.)

With a bit of arrogance, it seems, Satan asks permission of God to test Job, and God permits it, as long as Job's life isn't touched. Job 1 and 2 detail the devil's attempts to steal Job's possessions, children and his health.

Close friends and family are always first to notice our hardships. Job's friends were no different. They observed his suffering and came to his side to accompany him, but for seven days they didn't utter a word (Job 2:13)—that is, until the devil began whispering his words. In the night Job's best friend Eliphaz heard a voice that changed everything: "Now a word came stealing to me, my ear received the whisper of it. Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals, dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all

my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh bristled. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: 'Can mortals be righteous before God? Can human beings be pure before their Maker?'" (4:12-17).

Eliphaz reported that a spirit began to speak to him in the night, which caused him much fear and trembling. God doesn't cause dread, nor does He put His own words into question. Previously God had declared Job to be righteous and pure. But this spirit questioned that very identity. This was not the work of God but of Satan himself!

Satan posed these questions to steal Job's identity. Job's friend was so convinced by Satan's questions that he broke his silence to declare Job a sinner. At that point, Satan had won a victory. No longer was Job recognized by the identity that God had declared but by the one Satan had planted through his whispers.

The question Satan asked is an important one to consider, one he whispers to you and me almost daily: Can we be righteous and pure? Are we worthy of God's love? Certainly we aren't worthy based upon our own merits. The Bible asserts that we are all unrighteous because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Yet for those of us who have made Jesus our Lord and Savior, God *declares* us righteous (2 Cor. 5:21).

So what do we make of Satan's question? Can human beings be pure before their Maker? Yes, but only if God declares them as such. Know that you and I are *nothing* by ourselves, but we are *everything* in Christ.

Understanding my true identity in Christ was crucial to breaking the false identity I had built up from years of rejection. I'd to come to realize that I'm not my past, my struggles or what anyone else has ever said about me. God's

Word is my ultimate reality, and He calls me righteous, loved and accepted. This is your true identity too. Don't let any accusations or whispers from Satan make you believe otherwise.

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