

Why the Devil Is Such an Opportunist

When you love a prodigal, you get used to the roller coaster—the ups and downs, the unexpected turns, the dashed hope.

I know; I lived it. I remember well when my prodigal was making great progress. Better choices. Greater stability. Hope for a good future.

Then hard things happened, despair overcame. Bad choices. Old patterns. I felt like we had reverted to 10 years earlier.

Why was I surprised?

We have an enemy. That enemy is after those we love. Peter warned us: “Be sober and watchful, because your adversary the devil walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

John adds, “The thief does not come, except to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10a).

He is wily and smart. He studies our prodigals—to know the right temptation, the stumbling block most likely to succeed, the best time to attack.

Again, why should we be surprised? He did it to our Lord.

When the enemy followed Jesus into the wilderness, he was intent on destruction. But he was clever. He waited until he thought Jesus would be weak from hunger and thirst.

He used the Father’s own words—quoting Scripture repeatedly. He offered Jesus shortcuts—an easier way—to what was already to be His: power, authority, immortality.

Of course, Jesus was not deceived. He saw through the devil's schemes. He used Scripture to rebuke the devil, to resist him, to say no.

"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13, NIV).

Satan is such an opportunist.

He is ever vigilant to recapture our loved ones, to regain the advantage, to remind them of the pleasures of sin, to woo them back into places they have left. He watches for an opportune time.

We have some clear instructions: "Therefore submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7, MEV).

We can pray that our prodigals will remember the teaching they have received and resist the devil themselves. But often they will not be at a place in their lives to do that.

So we must stand in the gap.

We must pray on their behalf. We ask God to be their strong fortress, to protect them, to strengthen them, to point them to His way of escape from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

We must take an offensive stand against the evil one, according to scriptural patterns.

We must personally make sure we are resisting the devil and his temptations directed at us as well—he is persistent. We must walk with Christ in humility and holiness and in the power of the Spirit. All that we ask God to do on behalf of our prodigals, we must ask Him to do for us.

"Finally," Paul tells us in Ephesians 6, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the

devil" (Eph. 6:10-11).

The battle makes me weary.

Weary from the pain. The surprises. The expense. The disappointment. The late-night calls. The fear.

Weary in the waiting. The devil waits. And we must wait.

Sometimes it is challenging to follow through with this exhortation: "And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9).

But wait. Is there good in the waiting? God seems to say so. Let these many words on waiting sink in:

"And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up" (Rom. 8:25).

"Wait on the Lord; be strong, and may your heart be stout; wait on the Lord" ().

"Therefore be patient, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Notice how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is patient with it until he receives the early and late rain" (James 5:7).

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Think of those people throughout Scripture who waited: Abraham for a child; Joseph to get out of prison; Moses for Pharaoh to let his people go; the children of Israel in the desert to reach the promised land; the disciples for the Holy Spirit.

And God waits, too.

He has waited through all the prodigal seasons of His children. He waited for just the right time to send His Son in

the incarnation and now waits for the right time to send Him again. And He waits for each of us and each of our loved ones to surrender, to accept, to return and to trust.

So we wait.

“Therefore, the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore, He waits on high to have mercy on you; for the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all who long for Him” (Isa. 30:18).

We are blessed as we wait.

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Judy Douglass is a global writer, speaker and encourager. Her most recent book, *When You Love a Prodigal*, has ignited her new podcast of the same name. She directs Women's Resources at Cru.

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