Resist the Devil and He Will Flee

Last month I was the main speaker at a men's conference in Cali, Colombia—a city that was once the headquarters of the most powerful drug cartel in the world. The city is more peaceful today, but it's still known as a hub of violence. It's also famous for its indigenous witchcraft.

On the second night of our event several men surrendered to the lordship of Jesus, and others were filled with the Holy Spirit. That should have been a cause for rejoicing, but when I went back to my room that evening I felt an unusual heaviness. I battled a sense of sadness and dread—along with a strong desire to pack my suitcase and leave!

Because I've dealt with spiritual warfare many times in the past, I knew these dark emotions didn't originate with me. I knew Satan wasn't happy that we were invading his territory. I had to pray in the Holy Spirit, worship and declare God's Word just to push through the negative emotions.

The next morning, my friend Enrique, a pastor, told me that he had stayed up late the night before praying like I did. From the main meeting hall, which sat on top of a mountain, he noticed small fires in the back yards of several homes adjacent to our camp. He knew that some locals had probably heard us singing, and they were engaged in witchcraft incantations. He prayed fervently to break the power of this witchcraft.

In spite of this spiritual interference, the devil didn't win. The men who came to our retreat were transformed. But it was a fresh reminder to me that we can never let our guard down or take our spiritual armor off. If you are advancing God's kingdom you will never take ground without a fight.

After my experience in Colombia I decided to reread the story of Nehemiah. We always think of Nehemiah as a builder, but he was also a fighter. As soon as he began repairing the broken walls and gates of Jerusalem, God's enemies launched a calculated attack that involved serious psychological warfare.

Tobiah and Sanballat—Nehemiah's two chief enemies—began blaring their lies to the people of Israel, saying: "What are these feeble Jews doing? … Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones? …Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down" (Neh. 4:2-3). The enemies also threatened to kill the Jews.

This is how spiritual warfare works. Satan is a liar, a manipulator and a master of intimidation. When you are in his crosshairs, you may experience the following:

- Depression and feelings of hopelessness;
- A sense of condemnation for past mistakes;
- An overwhelming sense of failure and weakness, along with doubts about God's power to help you;
- Strong feelings of fear, and a desire to hide or escape;
- Discouragement and a strong temptation to give up;
- A feeling that you are suffocating, or that you are separated from God and His love and protection.

Whenever you find yourself under spiritual attack, remember how Nehemiah responded. He didn't bow one instant to Satan's psychological warfare. He spoke to the people and said: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and their houses" (Neh. 4:14).

From that moment each man held a builder's tool in one hand and a weapon in the other—and Nehemiah declared with faith: "Our God will fight for us" (Neh. 4:20). As a result of Nehemiah's courage, and the people's faith, Sanballat and

Tobias backed off, the city was rebuilt and the Jews returned to Jerusalem.

We are in a season of intensified spiritual warfare today. You don't have to look for a demon behind every bush, or focus on Satan's work. But you can't act as if the devil isn't real.

The apostle Paul made it clear that we have a "struggle"—and it is not against flesh and blood but against the "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Paul's instructions are clear in the next verse: "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (v. 13).

Spiritual warfare happens. If you are preaching the gospel, making disciples, building a church, growing a ministry, setting people free from Satan's power or advancing the kingdom of Jesus in any way, you will face backlash. But Satan's tactics are flawed and his roars are empty threats.

Don't let Satan's emotional manipulation steal your joy, destroy your confidence or convince you to quit. Learn to fight back. Sing even when you feel sad, pray even when you feel hopeless, and believe in God's promises even when you are tempted to doubt. When you resist, the devil is reminded one more time that he is a defeated foe and that hell has been reserved for him and his defeated army.

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