

The Back of Satan and the Face of God

War & Peace Part 6
James 4:7 7-19-2015

Summary: How do you deal with sin in your life? Repentance. James gives 10 commands about how to repent (plus two indictments and four promises). The first three commands are to submit to God, resist the devil, and draw near to God.

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James 4:5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he caused to live in us? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Introduction

How many of you are currently dealing with a serious financial problem? How about a major relationship problem with someone? How about a significant health problem? How about this – raise your hand if you’ve got a sin problem in your life. A passage of Scripture that teaches on the topic of how to deal with sin in our lives is guaranteed to be relevant for every soul that walks in the door. They say two things in life are certain – death and taxes, but more certain than either one of those is having a sin

problem. We talk a lot about how to avoid sinning in the first place, which is great. But no matter how much progress we make there, every last one of us is going to have a sin problem until the day we die. And so one of the most crucial things you can ever learn is how to deal with sin. What should you do after you have sinned? What do you do about those besetting sins that you just can't seem to get rid of? How do you deal with guilt and regret? If we don't know how to deal with the sin in our lives we are missing one of the most basic, essential parts of living the Christian life.

Review

We have been studying verse by verse through the book of James and we left off last week in chapter 4 verse 6 - God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. That's that gravity of grace principle – just as water always flows down to the lowest places, so God's grace flows down to the lowliest hearts. There's a reason why humble people have so many graces in their life, and the people with a lot of graces in their life are the humble people. You observe people and think, "Why can't I have faith as strong as his?"

"Why can't I have self-control like her?"

"Why can't I have delight in God like that person?"

"Why can't I be a peacemaker like them?"

When you find yourself saying that, isn't it almost always a humble person you are talking about? Why can't I have faith like him? Because in an argument, I have to win. In a conflict, I have to get my way. And so I forfeit the grace that could have been mine to give me strong faith or self-control or perseverance or whatever virtues I am lacking, because I refuse to let go of my pride. The only way to get more grace from God is to become more humble. But that left us with the question last week – how do I become more humble?

Repentance

The one word answer to that is *repentance*. That is also the one word answer to the question of how to deal with sin in your life – repentance. But James is going to give us more than just one word. I love this passage because it is so specific. James doesn't just tell us, "Repent!" He is going to show us the need for repentance with two strong rebukes, then he is going to give us no less than 10 commands to show us exactly how repentance is done, and on top of all that he is going to give us four amazing promises to motivate us.¹

This paragraph is the climax of this whole section that started in 3:1. In fact, you could make an argument that it is the climactic point of the whole book. Throughout the book he points out all kinds of sins and errors, and here is where he calls the readers to repentance for all of it. This passage is priceless, because it shows us exactly how to deal with sin in your life in a way that will leave you clean in the sight of God and in your own conscience, and that will make you much stronger and more able to resist that sin in the future, and that will give you much greater intimacy with God.

The Motivation for Repentance

So let's look at the motivation. He gives us four amazing promises.

¹ One practice that is, I think, a very wise practice is to find a blank page at the back of your Bible and write down important topics, and then key passages for those topics. And if you do that, repentance should definitely be one of the topics. And under that heading, make sure you have this passage listed. There are some other important passages on repentance that you also want in your list as well. You for sure want to include David's repentance in Psalm 51. And the repentance of the prodigal son in Luke 15:17-21. And the description of godly sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. It would be good to jot those three passages down in the back of your Bible as well, but don't leave out this section in James 4.

Promises

Whenever you read the Bible, always be on the lookout for God's great and precious promises because the key to all success in the Christian life is trusting what God has promised. Second Peter 1:4 says that it is by trusting God's promises that we can escape the corruption of this world caused by evil desires, and participate in the divine nature. So it is crucial that we keep our eyes open for promises when we read the Bible. And this passage has four of them – can you spot them?

They are easy to miss, because they appear right in the middle of a flurry of commands, and we can become so focused on the commands that we miss the promises. But if you look for them you can spot them.

Promise #1 is that God will give you grace that is greater than the whole problem of worldliness in your heart. Promise #2 is that the devil will flee from you. Promise #3 is that God will draw near to you. And promise #4 is that God will lift you up. How would you like to walk out of here today with all four of those in your back pocket? Overwhelming grace flooding into your life and God lifting you up, and you see the back of the devil as he runs away from you, and the face of God as He draws near to you.

Conditions

One thing you notice about these promises is that all four of them are conditional, which means there is something you have to do in order to get what is promised. Once in a while in Scripture you will find an unconditional promise, but most of God's promises are conditional. And that is actually a wonderful thing. I love conditional promises in Scripture, because the conditions give us direction. God attaches conditions to His promises to steer and guide our lives in the right direction.

Now, I realize that for some of you, as soon as you find out there is a condition, that spoils the whole promise. It's discouraging to you, because you are afraid you will not be able to meet the condition. You are afraid it will be too high and lofty and out of your reach. But here's the great news – it is not high; it is low. The conditions basically boil down to this: humble repentance. It is not out of anyone's reach. The reason people don't do it is not because it is too high for them and they are not able, but because it is too low for them and they are not willing. But anyone who is willing can meet the requirement. God does not require that you be able to jump over the moon. He only requires that you bow the knee in humble repentance. And absolutely any human being on the planet who is willing can do that.

The Humility Sandwich

So let's learn from James how to repent of pride, humble ourselves, and receive these four amazing promises – Satan running away, God drawing near, God lifting you up, and a life filled with grace. It begins and ends with humility.

This whole passage is like a sandwich, and the pieces of bread at the top and bottom are humility. And all the commands in between are the meat in the sandwich that show us what humility before God looks like. Repentance is all about humbling yourself before God. The first thing you need to know about how to deal with sin in your life is that there is no prideful repentance. People who want to maintain their dignity and save face and lift themselves above others and guard their reputation – those people are not repentant. You can't hang onto pride and also be repentant because pride is the thing that your repenting of. We saw that last week. Pride is the whole problem, and so if there is going to be any true repentance, a humble, submissive posture before God has to characterize every part of the process.

Okay, so let's take a look at the inside of the sandwich. There are 10 commands in this passage. We will only make it through the first three today. The first one is right there in verse 7 – **submit yourselves, then, to God.**

Submit to God

The word translated **submit** means to subordinate yourself under someone, or to enlist under a military leader. Like a soldier who says, “I want to serve under that great general. He’s a great military strategist. He wins every battle. I want to take orders from him.” Or an athlete who wants to play under some great coach. It is the picture of someone who realizes, “I’ll be a lot more effective, a lot better off following his direction than I would be following my own direction.”

Resisting influence

Submitting and resisting are opposites. We are to submit to God and resist the devil. Both concepts imply a response to a force that is being exerted on you. You cannot walk over to that wall and submit to it. That wall is not trying to exert any influence on you, so there’s no way you can submit to it. Nor can you resist it. The only way to resist or submit is if there is some attempt to either control you or influence you or guide you in some way. Both God and Satan are acting on your soul. And submission to one is always resistance against the other. There is no such thing as submission to God that does not involve resisting God’s archenemy. And when you submit to the enemy, you necessarily resist God.

Resisting God is suicide, obviously. But submitting to God is a wonderful and delightful thing, because that’s where all effectiveness in life comes from.

Think of yourself like a race car. When does a car win the race? When it has a great driver in the driver’s seat and the car is especially responsive to that driver. That is submissiveness.

Every one of us is like a car, and we are either being driven by God, or by the world, the flesh, and the devil. This command to submit to God means, “Invite God to be in the driver seat, and be responsive to everything He does.” When He turns the wheel, turn. When He hits the gas, go! If He hits the brakes, slow down. Not even the greatest driver in the world will win a race if the car is unresponsive to the driver. Especially if the car thinks it is the driver. If the transmission gets into the driver’s seat, nothing good happens. Transmissions are happiest when they are in their place – doing their thing, being used by the driver. Hammers are at their best when they are in the hand of a skilled carpenter. Pots and pans produce incredible delicacies when they are being used by a great chef. We are at our best when we are being used in the hands of God, and we are responsive, because we are tools, not little gods. We are vessels. We are created to be instruments in His hands. We are tools, and the worst thing that can happen for a tool is independence. A tool that finds its independence just sits on the ground and rusts. It is worthless. Its only value is when it is being used by the workman.

So, how do you deal with sin in your life? Think about God as the great general, the great coach, the great driver – so that you actually start to have excitement at the thought of being used as a tool in His hands. You have a longing for the effectiveness and meaning and productivity that will come out of your life when you become what you are created to be – a responsive instrument in His hands. Any repentance that does not involve a submissive posture toward God is not true repentance.

Structure

That is the first command. The next two commands go together. It’s easy to see the parallelism. They are opposites, and they both have a promise. So let’s group both of those under the heading *Return to God*.

Return to God

Turning Back to God

7 ...Resist the devil ... 8 Come near to God

Every time we sin, we are submitting to Satan, and resisting God. And so the most basic feature of repentance is the reversal of that. Instead of submitting to Satan and resisting God, you resist Satan and

draw near to God. That is why so often in the Bible when there is a call to repentance, you see the word “turn,” or “return.” You have got to do a 180. You cannot face in two directions at the same time.

This is a very, very important principle to understand about true repentance. It is not just turning away from the sin. It is turning away from the sin back *toward God*.² If you just stop doing some sinful action, but your heart does not return to God and draw near to Him, you haven’t repented. If you have been getting drunk every week, and one day you say, “That’s it – no more!” and you never drink a drop of alcohol for the rest of your life, that is not repentance unless you also turn back to God.

When I do some sinful thing, the reason I do that thing is because leading up to that moment my heart was moving in a certain direction. God is behind me, and I am moving away from Him. And then, as I’m moving that way I stumble into a sin. If I just stop doing that particular sin, and that is all that happens – I am still facing the same direction; I have not repented.

The Prodigal

One of the most helpful descriptions of repentance in the whole Bible is the repentance of the Prodigal Son. Jesus is making a point in that chapter about how God rejoices over sinners who repent, and so He makes up a story of a guy who sins against his father in the most extreme way. He takes his father’s money, abandons him, and goes off and blows it all on debauchery and drunkenness and a wild, partying lifestyle. Finally he runs out of money and hits rock bottom. The only job he could get was feeding some pigs, which, for a Jew is the most horrific, unclean situation imaginable, and he is so hungry he longs to eat some of the pig slop, but he is not even allowed to do that. (That is a pretty strict pig owner. It’s not like it’s going to ruin him financially to let this guy eat some of the pig slop. I think the idea here is this prodigal is being taken advantage of. That is Jesus picture of where sin will take you.)

Coming to Your Senses

Then his repentance begins to form in verse 17.

Luke 15:17 When he came to his senses

That is the starting point of all repentance by the way. Leaving your father and seeking happiness from sin is insanity. And so the beginning point of repentance is snapping out of that insanity and coming to your senses. But look at how Jesus describes coming to his senses. He doesn’t say, “This is insanity – I’ve got to find a better job.” He doesn’t say, “This is insanity – I need to cut back on all the partying and stay on a budget.” He doesn’t say, “This is crazy – I need to re-work my contract with my boss.” He says, “This is insanity – my dad is rich!”

17 ... he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’

Repentance is all about your attitude toward your father, and where true riches are to be found.

18 I will set out and go back to my father

There it is – *that is* the heart and soul of repentance. It is not mainly about stopping a certain activity, or cleaning up your act. It is first and foremost a matter of returning to your heavenly Father and preferring His house over the pleasures of the world.

There are many Christians who cannot gain victory over certain sins in their life because they never deal with the fact that those sins are proof that their heart has wandered from God. They think, “No, I

² The greatest chapter in the Bible on repentance is Psalm 51 – the prayer of repentance David prayed after his adultery and murder were exposed. As you read, you will notice that whole prayer is movement toward God. It is not mainly a list of things David is going to do to avoid future temptation. It is the cry of a heart that cannot stand another moment of distance from God’s presence, and desperately wants intimacy with Him again at any cost.

never left God. This was just a weird stumble, human weakness, a little mess-up – but I never walked away from God.”

They don’t have any sense of having left God, and so they don’t have a sense that they need to do anything to return to Him. They are far from God’s presence, but they do nothing to try to draw near to Him because they don’t realize they are far from Him.

Resist the Devil

And so James is going to tell us to draw near to God. But first, before we can do that, there is something else we need to do.

8 ...Resist the devil

James tells us to do to the devil the exact thing that God does to the proud - God resists the proud; we resist the devil. And until we do that, we can’t draw near to God.

A Decisive Break

When you commit adultery, if you want to get back with your spouse, first you have to break up with your lover. And that breakup has to be a decisive one. How many times do we try to draw near to God and a portion of our heart is still in love with the world? We haven’t made a decisive breakup with our sin.

Resist is an aggressive word, not a passive word. James says, “Stop fighting one another and start fighting the devil.” Our struggle is not against flesh and blood; it is against Satan and demons.

He Will Flee

So we need to go to war with Satan, and if we do, we will win. He will flee. That word translate **flee** means to run in fear, or flee to safety. You will see the devil’s back. That’s a great thought, but I have to admit, when I read that promise my first impulse is to think, *Since when?* In my experience, it seems like the harder I resist, the more Satan just turns up the heat. Some of you may have experienced times when you were tempted with some sin, and you resisted and resisted and fought and fought for hours – and then finally caved in. What happened to this promise? Why didn’t Satan run away?

Well, if the Bible promises that if I resist the devil he will flee, and he doesn’t flee, that only leaves one possibility – I wasn’t really resisting him.³ You see, it is possible to resist sin or resist temptation without really resisting the devil himself. As I was studying this, and I had the question, “What does James mean by ‘Resist the devil’?” I started looking back in the book at what James says the devil’s work is. And the focus is not just on temptation. In fact, James gave us a whole section on temptation in chapter 1 and never even mentioned the devil. So resisting the devil is more than just resisting temptation. It is a fight against a person.

Look Past the Temptation to the Person

When we fall into sin, we need to understand that was not just some random impulse. There is a person who led you step-by-step down a path that resulted in you falling into that sin. And this person is a vicious, evil, angry, hateful spiritual being who is determined to do you the greatest possible harm. He disguises himself as an angel of light, but the reality is he *really* hates you, his teeth are bared, and he

³ You see, whenever our experience does not seem to match what the Bible says, we know that either our interpretation of the Bible is wrong or our interpretation of our experience is wrong, because the Bible always coincides perfectly with reality. And in this case, it is usually that we are misinterpreting our experience. We think we are resisting the devil when really all we are doing is resisting some particular sin.

wants nothing for you but your total destruction. And worse than that, he hates God and is doing everything he can to dishonor God. Do you really want to cooperate with that? When we are being served some sinful delicacy on a platter, we would do well to look up and see who it is who's serving it to us. Then we will wake up to the fact that this is a lot bigger than just, "Am I going to do the right thing or the wrong thing?" It is that, but it is also, "Am I going to cooperate with a monster that's trying to ruin me?" Second Timothy 2:26 tells us what happens to people who do not resist – Satan takes them captive to do his will. Resist him or be enslaved by him - those are the only two options.

The Power of God

"Okay, so I've come to grips with the fact that Satan is behind this temptation. Now what? What do I do now that will make him run away in fear?" I think it is safe to say that nothing is going to make Satan run away in fear unless we introduce God into the picture. He is the only one who can scare Satan, because he is the only one who can hurt Satan. Satan is not going to be afraid of me – what am I going to do to him? If we are going to make the devil flee, we are going to need some divine firepower. And yet, this command is directed to us. He doesn't say, "Wait for God to scare Satan away." He tells us to do it. It is something we can do that will unleash God's power on Satan and send him running. What is it? What does James say about the devil's work in this context? If you haven't been with us – James has been making the point that all our hostile speech, and our fights and quarrels – it all comes as a result of us buying into the world's values, the world's perspectives, and the world's way of thinking. James calls that earthly wisdom. And guess who the author of earthly wisdom is.

James 3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

It is from demons, which means it is ultimately from Satan. That's the work of Satan here in the immediate context. So when James says that, and then he tells us to repent of that worldliness, and one part of that repentance involves resisting the devil, we know exactly what he has in mind. Resisting the devil means resisting the influence of his evil ideas and attitudes, which are proliferated through human wisdom.

So how do we fight against human wisdom? With the wisdom from above.

James 3:14 if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts ...15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ... 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

That is how you fight back. That is what will make the devil run away. If you try to rebuke Satan, or bind him, or cast him out, or gain control over him with some kind of incantation or power encounter – you can do that until you're blue in the face and he'll just laugh at you.⁴ But if you start showing humility, and you are a peacemaker, and you are considerate and submissive and full of mercy, and you do that because you want to be on God's side and not Satan's – Satan will flee from you.

Submission to God

Satan is rebuffed by righteousness. He is repelled by repentance. He is stymied by submission to God. Submitting to God and resisting the devil are two sides of the same coin.

⁴ Jesus cast out demons to prove that He was God, and He gave that ability to His Apostles to prove that they were speaking the Word of God, but all the passages that teach us how to do battle against Satan, whether it be Ephesians 6, or 1 Peter 5 or 1 Corinthians 7 or 2 Corinthians 2 or 1 Timothy 4 or 2 Corinthians 10 – all the passages that teach us directly about how to defeat Satan – not a word about rebuking or binding or casting or any of that. Jesus' ministry of driving out demons was not for the purpose of teaching us how to fight against Satan in everyday life. It was to prove He was God. So how are ordinary Christians supposed to fight Satan? Jesus showed us that by example when He faced off with Satan in the wilderness. He fought against Satan for 40 days, and He didn't bind Satan, He didn't cast him into hell – He didn't use any miraculous power. Why? Because He was experiencing what you and I experience, so that Hebrews could say that He was tempted in every way, just as we are, and was yet without sin. He laid down His divine power to crush Satan, and fought against him the way we have to fight against him. He used a method that you and I can replicate. What was it? He countered Satan's lies with the truth of Scripture.

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil...

And that makes sense, right? If I have God in the driver seat, if I am a tool in His hand, if I'm an arrow being pulled back on His string, then look out devil. Some weapons are more dangerous than others, but any weapon is dangerous if it is in the hands of someone who knows what he is doing. If you think of an old Bruce Lee movie – he could beat up 20 guys with a noodle if he wanted to. And that's a way to show superior strength – using a weak instrument to defeat someone. It reminds me of a scene I saw in a movie where Sean Connery beat up this big, huge guy in a bar using only his right thumb. What was the point of that? Because he wanted to show the extent of his superiority. And God does that. He scares Satan away using the likes of us - if we submit ourselves to Him so that He uses us. If I bow the knee and stop resisting God and submit to what He is doing, then I become an instrument in His hand – and that is lethal for Satan. Some weapons are more dangerous than others. But you take pretty much any weapon, and put it in the hands of someone who knows what he's doing, and it becomes lethal.

So how do I send Satan running? Start doing God's will. The next time Satan starts coming on strong, and you are doing battle, instead of just looking at the sin and saying, "I gotta say no, I gotta say no, I gotta say no," you think to yourself, "What is one thing I could do right now that I know for sure is God's will? How can I be used by God right now?"

Scripture

All of that is how you counter Satan's demonic human wisdom. And, of course, the basis for all of it is Scripture. Just as James said back in chapter 1 – **humbly accept the Word...which can save your soul**. If Satan does his work by deceiving us through human wisdom, our weapon to fight that is going to be the wisdom that comes from heaven which is revealed in God's Word.

That's the weapon that completely disarms the devil. What can Satan do to you if you believe the truth of God's Word? Absolutely nothing. So what is the bottom line of all that? It's this: if you want to send Satan packing, that's done through righteousness and truth. Righteousness and truth. Righteousness – submitting to God, repenting of your sins, humbling yourself, peacemaking – all of that. And truth – knowing and believing what God's Word says rather than just operating on natural, human wisdom. That is the two-pronged attack that will make the devil flee.

And you will see that everywhere in the New Testament where it talks about how to do spiritual warfare. The most thorough chapter in Scripture on spiritual warfare is Ephesians 6 - with the armor of God. And what is our weapon there? The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. And the shield is faith – believing what the Word says. And the breastplate is righteousness. 2 Corinthians 10 teaches us how to demolish Satan's strongholds. How is that done? By taking the devil's arguments and forcing them into obedience to Christ (2 Cor.10:4-5). How do we resist Satan in 1 Timothy 4? By countering the doctrines of demons with the Word of God. Over and over we see the same thing. Satan attacks us by means of truth claims – trying to convince us to believe certain things. Trying to trick us into thinking in worldly ways. And we fight back by exposing those lies and thinking in biblical ways. What does the Bible say about the situation? What does the Bible say about money? What does the Bible say about what to do when somebody gets mad at you? What does the Bible say about suffering loss, or getting sick, or physical fitness, or self-esteem, or how to deal with fools? That is true spiritual warfare. Jesus cast out demons to prove He was God, but when He fought against Satan in the wilderness, what did He do? He countered Satan's lies with truths from Scripture.

Truth and righteousness. Satan tried to create animosity between Paul and the Corinthians by convincing Paul that it was okay to hold a grudge. How did Paul fight back? By forgiving the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 2:10 ...I have forgiven ... 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

14 Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

He masquerades, he deceives, he lies, he tries to persuade and convince – and that is how he attacks us. When your car breaks down in the middle of a rainstorm on your way to a really important meeting, that is not the devil's attack. The devil's attack is after all that happens and he whispers in your ear that an ungodly response is perfectly reasonable.

Humility

And remember, this is all inside the humility sandwich. The influence of the devil is always in the direction of pride. When you see this verse about resist the devil – don't think mainly about trying to say no to that impulse to have a second donut. Resisting fleshly temptations is part of resisting the devil, but even more fundamental than that is resisting a certain way of thinking that puts self first. If I am tempted to eat a donut that I shouldn't eat, and I say no and walk away, I have resisted a donut. But if I realize that the impulses being driven by an attitude that says my immediate pleasure and comfort is more important than godly wisdom, and I resist that prideful attitude, then I have not just resisted a donut – I have resisted the devil. When you think biblically, Satan absolutely can't deal with that. He has no weapon that can counter that. If you humble yourself and submit to God, Satan's got nothing.

Keep Resisting - He WILL Flee

And so he will flee – that's the promise. You will see the devil's back as he runs away. Ephesians 4:27 says that when we sin we give a place to the devil, which means when we resist there is no place for him. Do you realize what an amazing promise that is? If you are willing to win, you will absolutely be able to win – no exceptions. Resisting always works.

“What about when I resist for a while but then I ultimately lose the battle?”

That is because at some point you stopped resisting. Remember James' words about perseverance in chapter 1. John Piper: “Here is where many fail. They give in too soon. They say, “I tried to push [the sinful thought] out, and it didn't work.” I ask, “How long did you try?” How hard did you exert your mind? The mind is a muscle. You can flex it with vehemence. ... Hold the promise of Christ before your eyes. Hold it. Hold it! Don't let it go! Keep holding it! How long? As long as it takes. Fight! For Christ's sake, fight till you win! If an electric door were about to crush your child you would hold it up with all your might and holler for help, and hold it and hold it and hold it and hold it.” Persevere. Why? Because as long as you resist, you will be victorious. There will never be a situation where you will resist and Satan will just simply overpower you. God will never let that happen. God has given us a power that has a 100% guarantee. Satan can never overcome you without your consent

Now, when Satan flees, will he come back later and try again? Yes, that's what he did with Jesus. Jesus resisted him, defeated him, and it says that Satan fled until a more opportune time (Luke 4:13). We all know what it's like to stand firm during the first and second and third assault, only to fall at the fourth or fifth. But those first three victories are still real victories. Every moment that you resist Satan is a major discouragement to him.

One of the most important principles of fighting Satan is perseverance. Our natural tendency is to always focus on individual battles, but Satan is focused on the overall war. So often we lose one battle and then quit.

“I've already blown it – might as well just go all the way now.”

We lose sight of the fact that one battle is just one battle – it's not the whole war. If you lose a battle, get back up and win the next one.

Proverbs 24:16 Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.

“If he fell seven times, why is he called a righteous man? That’s a lot of times to fall.”

He’s called a righteous man because even though he fell seven times, he got up seven times. The wicked are the ones who fall seven times and get up six times. Keep in mind the whole war. If you fall, recover. Get up, pick that sword back up, dust that shield off, and get back into the fray. And the same goes for victories. Don’t start celebrating too soon just because you won one or two battles. Satan flees, but then he comes back, so remain vigilant until the day you die. Never let down your guard.

Draw near to God

Resist the devil, and then you can draw near to God. Now that you have made the decisive break with the world, and you have busted up that love affair your heart was having with the sin, now you can draw near to God. And that is the only place you’ll be safe. Imagine that you were a young, new recruit in the Army back in the days of King David. You get into your first battle with the Philistines and you get cut off from your comrades around you, nothing but Philistines all around you, the battle is getting hotter and hotter and you are starting to get overwhelmed and then you see, “Ah - there’s David over there. I need to get over by him!” As soon as you get next to David, you’re fine. He is just mowing down Philistines like a lawnmower with his right hand. With his left hand he’s eating an apple or something. And you think, *now I’m safe*. When you are in spiritual warfare, fighting against incredibly powerful spiritual beings that you can’t even see – beings who have successfully brought down the most powerful men and women in history, you are in way, way over your head. You need to get close to God.

How do you do that? Start by listening to Him. When you first get up in the morning, spend some time in His Word and in prayer, and get that fire started for the day. Then take one thought from that time with God, one of His attributes, a principle from Scripture, and keep that on the front burner of your thinking all day long. Whenever you experience pleasure, interpret that as a gesture of God’s love. Whenever you experience pain, use it to increase the thirst of your soul and the craving of your heart for the presence of God. And then strive to make each thing you do all through the day a little active fellowship with God.

This is how you deal with sin in your life. When you read your Bible, don’t just read it like homework at school. Read it to get close to God.⁵ While you are reading, pray and say, “God, please come near me in this room while I’m reading.” And then believe that He will do it. When you listen to a sermon, make it an hour of worship. Any kind of fighting against Satan that does not involve drawing near to God isn’t real fighting.

He Will Draw Near to You

But if you do draw near to God, here is the greatest promise of all – He will draw near to you. You will not only see the devil’s back – you’ll see the face of God as He draws near to you. Which is really good news, because drawing near to God is kind of like drawing near to the opposite side of the galaxy. If God doesn’t make a movement toward you, all the movement in the world toward Him will get you nowhere. But He does move toward you. We started in Luke 15 with the story of the Prodigal Son. What happened when the son finally returned to the father? He was all ready with his big speech about how he was unworthy to be a son, and he just wanted to come back as a slave.

Luke 15:20 ... “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

⁵ Just as worldliness is not mainly about behavior, but about what you love, so it is with godliness. Godliness is not mainly reading the Bible and going to church and praying - those are the influences that lead to godliness just like watching movies and listening to secular music are the influences that lead to worldliness

The son still tries to get that speech out...

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son...’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Inch toward God and He will step toward you. Step toward God and He will run toward you. Run toward God and He will fly to you. The best we can do is climb to the top of Mt. Everest, but if we will do that, God will make up the rest of the distance across the Galaxy and come near to us, and make His home with us.

Well, that is part of it. But how do you know when that has happened? What is it like when God draws near to you? And where does sorrow and contrition come in? And what if it’s not there? And what about the cleansing part? How am I supposed to wash my own heart and hands? As hard as I tried, I was not able to cram all four points into one sermon, so we’ll plan on picking it up there next time.

Benediction: Ephesians 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ... 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. Which of the common repentance substitutes are you most prone to? (Turning from sin but not returning to God, trying to return to God without fighting against Satan, failure to wash your hands or heart, or lack of contrition)
2. In what area(s) would you like to see more sorrow in your life? Is the lack of sorrow mostly due to undervaluing the thing lost when you sin? Or lack of awareness that it is being lost?
3. In what area(s) would you like to see less sorrow in your life (times when your heart overvalues the thing lost)?