

Resistance

Overcoming the Flesh • Message 8

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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Pray that the people of Brookwood know their unique temptations inside of them.
- Pray that we would come up with a plan to fight against the enemy in this life.

Scripture Reading:

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

Galatians 5:18-18 (NLT)

This is the word of the Lord.

A. Introduction

So, I spent eight days in a foreign country that didn't serve burgers. Yes, that's right. In this country, cows are seen as divine beings, which meant that one of my entire food groups—beef—was off the table.

After about three or four days of the same meal over and over, I started thinking about how often I get to choose whatever I have a taste for. Suddenly, I was in a situation where I didn't have that choice.

At first, I just missed a good burger—medium temp, delightful cheese, grilled jalapeños. But soon, it became more than just missing a favorite food. I noticed my attitude shifting. I got frustrated more easily, grew negative, and, honestly, I missed out on the blessings and joys of serving. Now, I think most people on the trip wouldn't have noticed this externally, but inside, I was struggling.

And this struggle connected with me in a new way because, for six straight days, my only food choices were rice, naan bread, chicken, and different sauces. Now, don't get me wrong, butter chicken is amazing. But butter chicken for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for a week? Not so much.

Meanwhile, our team was visiting villages that, before Brookwood and our ministry partner in India got involved, didn't have clean water for their families. We served meals to children rescued from slavery, abandoned by their families, or taken to be trafficked. One young man we met had been chosen by the Hindi priest in his village to be a human sacrifice. Then, I saw a child scramble to pick up a stray piece of rice that had bounced off his plate.

And that's when it hit me. Here I was, frustrated over my lack of menu choices while these children were grateful for a handful of rice. You'd think that every time I saw their reality, it would put my complaints in perspective. But the truth is, even though I *knew* my situation wasn't really a problem, I still *felt* what I felt.

I missed my food. I missed my home. I missed my life.

And that's when I realized: How easily does my faith get disrupted—even damaged—by unmet physical desires?
How many of you become negative, complain, or grow bitter simply because you don't get your way?

For some, that negativity is obvious. But for others, it's more subtle. Instead of outright bitterness, you just don't maximize the blessings God has given to you because your hearts are consumed by your cravings.

And this—this is one of the major battles of Christianity—the **Flesh vs. the Spirit**.

As a reminder, this is one of the reasons we are teaching this series *Resistance*. When we get serious about our faith, the enemy takes us seriously. When we take steps towards God, the enemy takes steps towards us.

This is the war between the life God offers and the life our flesh desires. But too often, you don't even know how to fight.

So today, I want to give you a battle plan:

1. **Know Your Enemy**
2. **Set Up Your Defense**
3. **Launch Your Offense**

B. The Battle of the Flesh and the Spirit

1. Know your ENEMY.

(Galatians 5:19-21; C/R: Proverbs 17:22; 1 John 2:16)

The fight against sin isn't just about external temptations. The real war happens inside of us.

The external enemy of our soul will *use* what's inside of us to get us trapped in destructive habits. 1 John 2:16 describes the three key areas of temptation: *the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life*.

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NLT)

When we see this list of behaviors, it is important to note that these are all things that Satan counterfeits. Satan is not a creator or an artist. He's a counterfeiter. So, these things that our flesh desires are counterfeits of the life that God offers to us.

Often, people reduce "lust of the flesh" to just sexual sin. But Paul, in Galatians 5, describes it much more broadly—categorizing it into four areas:

1. **Sexual desires** (immorality, impurity, licentiousness) Perversion of Love.
2. **Religious desires** (idolatry, sorcery) Perversion of Worship
3. **Desire for connection** (jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, envy) Perversion of Community
4. **Indulgence** (drunkenness, wild parties) Perversion of Celebration and Patience

Paul isn't listing *every* possible sin. Instead, he ends with "and the like," meaning there's more that could be included.

The recovery community has a concept that helps with this: **H.A.L.T.** Beware when you are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired.**

1. **Hungry**
2. **Angry**
3. **Lonely**
4. **Tired**

I began realizing my heart was sinking into darkness. I recognized through the help of the people in my life that I was becoming less and less laughy. I know that's not a word, but let me explain. People have told me that I have a very distinct laugh. It echoes down the hallways. But a few people said, *JC, we just haven't heard you laugh like that in a long time.* And while that was a small comment, as I began to reflect on that, they were right. So, I began to pray. I asked God for a Scripture that would focus my prayers, and He gave me one.

Proverbs 17:22 says *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.* And I began praying that I would be known as someone cheerful. If you know me, you know this is a funny prayer. Cheerful is not usually the first word that comes to people's minds when they think about me. Usually, it is something like intense, direct, wise, good looking. Just kidding, only one person thinks that when I come to mind. I started to make this a part of my daily prayer for my heart.

And then one day, someone just shared, *You seem happier. You seem cheery.* I didn't think about it until later that night, but somehow, God had been remaking me and utilizing those daily prayers for my heart to be cheerful.

This thing inside of me, the lack of satisfaction, was something the enemy capitalized on. My desire for joy is not bad. But the enemy tweaked that desire to whisper that my life wasn't good enough. The enemy isn't ourselves; the enemy uses our own personal desires, sometimes godly desires and wants, to get us off track and headed towards destruction.

Because a **restless heart is a reckless heart.**

Or, as I like to say, *Tired minds make tired choices. Tired choices make tired souls.*

2. **Set up your DEFENSE.**

(Matthew 26:41. C/R: Proverbs 4:23; Romans 13:14; Ephesians 5:14)

Once you know what you're up against, you need a strategy.

Jesus gives us a simple yet powerful defense in Matthew 26:41:

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
(Matthew 26:41 NIV)

- **Watch:** Be spiritually vigilant. *Guard your heart because from it flows life.* Proverbs 4:23.

Ephesians 5 says to *Wake up sleeper.* Paul was urging the reader to turn from sin to Christ. To pay attention. To be watchful.

Three key defenses to guard your heart:

1. **Adopt a posture of self-examination** – Take time daily to reflect on your heart. Ask God to reveal what's growing inside of you.
2. **Recognize that sin never rests, but neither should your dependence on God** – Be alert and active in seeking His presence. And remember, even though the enemy never rests, *God Himself rested.* Follow His pattern. Work hard but also embrace Sabbath rest.

This is true in exercise science as well. Exercise scientists say that rest and recovery are equally essential components of an exercise program. How much rest? 1 day, every 7 to 10 days.

3. **Don't indulge your desires** – Romans 13:14 says, *Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.* The best way to avoid sin isn't just resisting temptation—it's avoiding the situations that lead to it.

Remember the Lord's prayer about temptation; what does it say? *And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*

We should be trying to avoid temptation.

If you were trying to stick to a budget, you wouldn't spend your free time browsing expensive stores or scrolling through shopping apps, knowing they could tempt you to overspend. In the same way, if you were trying to heal from a toxic relationship, you wouldn't keep rereading old messages or checking their social media because you know it would pull you back into something unhealthy. And if you were training for a marathon, you wouldn't stay up late every night, skip workouts, and fuel your body with junk food because every choice impacts your endurance.

Likewise, in our spiritual lives, **you have to be intentional about where you go, what you consume, and what you allow to shape your heart**—because you don't drift toward holiness by accident.

3. **Launch your OFFENSE.**

(Psalm 119:11, 17-18. C/R: Philippians 1:6)

Avoiding sin isn't enough. You also have to actively pursue God. The most powerful weapon you have is **prayer**.

John Owen said: *If we do not abide in prayer, we will abide in temptation.*

Three ways to pray against temptation:

1. **Abide in prayer** – Make time to sit with God daily.

This idea of abiding in prayer is when you begin to feel that prayer is the most important use of your time. Being with God is more important than any other way you can spend your time.

2. **Meditate on Scripture** – Let God's Word reshape your thoughts.

I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 119:11 (NLT)

It is also important that you know how to live life with God. This comes from having your thoughts and choices guided by the Word of God. This meditation in prayer allows you to know how to live and ultimately gives you the fuel you need as you resist the enemy in your life.

So many of you ask us, *How can we grow in our prayer life? How can you pray more effectively? How can you jumpstart your heart through prayer?* I think one tool to aid you in this is meditating on God's word.

Meditation is putting your full presence and your senses onto the subject of God's Word.

This is the step that I took for my own heart. Remember, I found a promise and clung to it.

3. **Pray for transformation, not just behavior change** – Don't just ask for help to "avoid sin." Ask for a heart that desires God more than anything else.

Be good to your servant, that I may live and obey your word.

Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions.

Psalm 119:17-18 (NLT)

This type of being ultimately leads to a change in who you are. Being with God changes us and leads us into closer obedience to Him. Obedience to God results in world-shifting changes.

Imagine you begin becoming more generous, bolder and more courageous in your faith, more loving towards those around you; imagine serving those around you more effectively; imagine winning people to Jesus with your words and your life. You see the difference this transformation makes.

Imagine the 1100 or so of you in this room and how you can begin to change this community in dramatic Heavenly ways.

C. Conclusion

Our hearts will never change through willpower alone. They change through **the power of the Holy Spirit**. Even your lack of a desire to change is an assault from the enemy, but these desires are just counterfeits of God's desires. But in order to really overcome this battle with your flesh:

- We must **KNOW OUR ENEMY**
- We must proactively **SET UP OUR DEFENSE**
- We also should **LAUNCH AN OFFENSE**

Philippians 1:6 says *He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.*

So today, I don't want you to leave thinking *I need to try harder*. I actually want you to leave today understanding all of this is possible through Jesus. You might be thinking that you can never overcome your past, you may never find healing, you may never see transformation. But through Christ and the Holy Spirit, you can have victory.

As we close today, take a moment and remember that it is not up to us; God will finish what He started. Claim that today as we sing. Instead of help me to try harder, I want you to pray, *Holy Spirit, change me. Holy Spirit, give me what I need for today. Empower me, through the blood of Christ, to change.*

Because only **He** can.