

Sermon: Keep Your Wits & Stand Firm

Text: 1 Peter 5:8-14

Discussion Questions:

Most of us are familiar with an author by the name of C.S. Lewis—primarily because of a collection of books entitled, *“The Chronicles of Narnia.”* What you may not know is that early in his life, Lewis was an atheist. When he was a child, his mother died from cancer, causing him to blame God for her death. His conversion to faith in Christ took years of intellectual struggle—and came only after being convinced that faith was reasonable. Ironically, the fact that Lewis was so deeply bothered by evil and suffering in the world is the very thing that ultimately led him to believe in God.

A topic that Lewis continued to write about throughout his life was the question of good and evil. If God is good—how can there be evil in the world? One of the books he wrote to answer this question is called, *“The Screwtape Letters.”* The book is a collection of fictional letters supposedly written by a demon named Screwtape—writing to instruct his young nephew (also a demon) by the name of Wormtail. Wormtail is just learning the ways of tempting and leading people away from God (who Uncle Screwtape calls “the Enemy”).

Here are some quotes from *The Screwtape Letters*. Read them aloud, and take a little time to discuss each one (remember, these are fictionalized accounts of various strategies a demon might use to confuse or tempt a believer):

“There is nothing like suspense and anxiety for barricading a human’s mind against the Enemy (God). He (God) wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them.”

“Indeed the safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

“It’s funny how mortals always picture us (demons) as putting things into their minds; in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”

“Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s will (God’s will), looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him (God) seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.”

“If once they get through this initial dryness successfully, they become much less dependent on emotion and therefore much harder to tempt.”

“Surely you know that if a man can’t be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighborhood looking for the church that ‘suits’ him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches... The search for a ‘suitable’ church makes the man a critic where the Enemy wants him to be a pupil.”

“All extremes, except extreme devotion to the Enemy, are to be encouraged.”

Examination:

- Read **1 Peter 5:8-10**
 - Throughout this letter, Peter has been discussing various *difficult situations* that Christians can find themselves in. Read and discuss each one:
 - The internal temptations and sinful desires that we all face—and that wage war against our souls (2:11).
 - A pagan and fallen world that will accuse Christians of “doing wrong,” even if what they are doing is honest, loving, noble and good (2:12).
 - The “human authorities” (e.g., emperor’s and governors) who can be wicked and corrupt and persecute those who follow Christ (2:13-15).
 - People who are enslaved and mistreated by harsh and ungodly masters (2:18-21)
 - Wives who are married to unbelievers (3:1-6).
 - Christians who suffer for doing good (3:13-18; 4:12-19).
 - Summarize the WAY that Peter is calling Christians to respond in all of these difficult situations (start with 1 Peter 3:15).
 - WHY do you think Peter is calling believers to respond in this way? Does he just want us to be nice people?
 - It’s not until we get to **1 Peter 5:8** (towards the end of Peter’s letter) that we get to the root of the problem. What is that root? When emperor’s or ungodly masters persecute and mistreat—who is it that is ultimately doing the persecuting?
 - How does knowing this (that the devil is on the prowl and seeking to devour us) change the way we view those who are persecuting us? Does looking at things this way change our perspective—and help us to act with greater compassion and grace?
 - In what way are we to overcome the temptations of the devil (v. 9)?
 - Does expecting the greater reward change our perspective on suffering (v. 10)?

- Read **1 Peter 5:12-14**
 - What do you think it meant to Peter to have Silas, whom he refers to as a “faithful brother,” standing with him and helping him (v. 12)? Talk about a time when someone stood by your side, and helped you through a difficult time?
 - What do you think it means to “stand fast” in the true grace of God?
 - Nearly all scholars agree that “Babylon” (v. 13) is a code word for “Rome.” Why do you think Peter felt the need to refer to Rome this way? What do you know about Babylon in the OT (Old Testament) that corresponds with Rome in the NT?
 - This reference to “Mark” (aka John Mark...the author of the Gospel of Mark) is actually very significant—for many reasons. It was Mark who deserted Paul (Acts 13:13), and caused Paul and Barnabas to go separate ways (Acts 15:36-41). Yet, here is Mark standing with Peter—and ultimately writing what is widely believed to be the first of the four Gospels based largely on Peter’s testimony. How does this show that it’s not how you start—but how you finish—that really matters?

Application:

Resisting the devil happens one moment at a time. One temptation at a time. One choice at a time. Live today one decision at a time. By God’s grace, make the right NEXT choice.