

The Great Enemy and how to Fight him

(Suitable for use within a group over approximately one hour, or for an individual's personal Bible reading)

Thinking about your life as a student in healthcare

Up to 50% of those students who begin studying medicine or dentistry who claim to be a Christian at the beginning of their course, by the end of their course have fallen away from Jesus. We need to know who our true enemy is (particularly in the midst of suffering), and what battle we are really fighting.

1. Consider your colleagues around you. They, just like our western world at large, probably perceive suffering to be the ultimate enemy in their lives.
Why do you think they perceive suffering to be this? What does this reveal about their core values?
2. What do you think your colleagues would perceive the devil's work to be? Does it usually involve anything to do with faith?
3. Think of a colleague who you would say has 'suffered' in the time you have known them. How would you say this suffering changed them? (For example, at the end of it were they more bitter, less naïve, stronger, weaker, or never really got over it?).
4. If you ever have thought, 'this is an attack from the devil' – to what were you referring?

What does God have to say?

Read 1 Peter 5:8-11.

Peter Singer, Australia's most well known ethicist, purports that the philosophical drive undergirding the lives of 21st century 'Western' people is twofold: maximisation of choice and maximisation of comfort. Consequently, often subconsciously we face life with the following motto – *suffering is the enemy, and the thing most precious to us is comfort and pleasure*. Suffering challenges our precious things.

The Apostle Peter however tells us something quite different – the devil is the enemy, and the thing most precious to us is faith (in God as he has revealed Himself). It is actually the devil that challenges that which is most precious to us.

Peter warns us to be self controlled and alert, because the **devil** is always looking to destroy us. What does Paul mean by 'destroy'? The answer comes in verse 9, as Peter reveals the solution to the challenge of the devil – **stand firm in the faith**. It is faith that the devil will try and destroy in you and me, and suffering provides the perfect, ripe circumstance for him to do this (hence why Peter mentions this here in this letter). Peter mentions again that **suffering is not unusual** in this life (1 Peter 4:12; brothers throughout the world are undergoing these sufferings), so don't waste your energy fighting it as if it is something that you plan to eradicate in your life. Rather, pour your energies into ensuring that you stand firm in the faith, that you might fight the devil's schemes.

Just when we may read this passage and feel some concern for the wellbeing of our faith when tested, Peter gives solid encouragement that ultimately **God will preserve** and sustain you. Not only this, but once through a time of suffering (which serves to test our faith), God himself will make this faith 'strong, firm and steadfast'. He has the **power** to bring you through suffering – and to bring your faith through the furnace of suffering (1:7) – and to *strengthen* your faith through suffering.

Putting it into practice

Think back to the last time you felt you were suffering whilst studying this course. (Remember, suffering may not be externally obvious – challenges to your faith often come in the form of thoughts rather than circumstances!).

1. List three things that you felt challenged your faith in God and His promises.
2. What kind of thoughts or questions arose concerning God during this time? Reflect on how the devil might use these questions to destroy your faith.
Had you ever thought of the devil's hand in this process?
3. List three practical things that you can do during a time of testing, or suffering, that will help you stand firm in your faith.
4. You have a Christian peer who is exhausted from the workload of study, so stressed she is not eating and is so busy that she is struggling to make it to a weekly bible study. What things will you pray for your friend?

Bible Bites

(Suitable to be completed over approximately 20-25 minutes)

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⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.'

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