

They Don't Have to Take the Gift Away

One of the greatest misunderstandings about spiritual warfare is the assumption that opposition must always look like destruction.

People imagine the enemy's objective is obvious ruin: destroy the family, destroy the career, destroy the body, destroy the reputation, destroy the opportunity. But destruction is only one way to stop a person. Sometimes it is not even the most effective way. A person does not have to lose the gift God gave him if he can simply be prevented from using it properly. He does not have to abandon his purpose if his attention can be scattered across everything except his purpose. He does not have to become evil if he can be kept exhausted. He does not have to stop believing in God if his appetites can slowly become more important than obedience. He does not have to publicly collapse if he can spend his entire life almost becoming the person he was equipped to become.

This is why Paul's words in Ephesians 6:12 are so important: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood," but against principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places. That verse does not tell Christians to ignore the physical world. It tells them the physical world is not the entire battlefield. There are human decisions, psychological vulnerabilities, habits, environments, relationships, institutions, desires, and ordinary circumstances, but Scripture places another dimension behind the visible one. The battle cannot always be understood by staring at the nearest person and deciding that person is the enemy. Sometimes the visible conflict is only where a deeper weakness is being expressed.

That changes the way distraction should be understood. Distraction sounds harmless because modern culture treats it as a productivity problem. You were supposed to work, but you watched videos

instead. You were supposed to pray, but you checked your phone. You were supposed to build something, but you spent the evening arguing with strangers. Tomorrow you will do better. No great tragedy occurred. Yet attention is one of the most valuable things a human being possesses because attention determines where portions of life are spent. Money lost can sometimes be earned again. An opportunity missed may sometimes return. Time does not. Every hour surrendered is an hour of life that cannot be retrieved, which means distraction repeated long enough becomes something much larger than distraction. It becomes direction.

That is what makes it spiritually dangerous. A person can be moving constantly while traveling nowhere important. He can answer messages, solve emergencies, chase money, consume information, maintain relationships, argue about politics, watch entertainment, scroll through other people's lives, satisfy appetites, and collapse into bed genuinely exhausted. He was busy all day. But busyness and purpose are not synonyms. If this pattern repeats for ten years, nobody needed to physically stop him from becoming what he was capable of becoming. His attention did the work.

The enemy does not always need to destroy God's best soldiers. Sometimes he only needs to keep them from becoming who God equipped them to become.

Scripture repeatedly shows that strength does not eliminate vulnerability. In fact, some of the Bible's strongest people are remembered partly because their weaknesses were so consequential. Samson possessed extraordinary physical strength, but physical strength could not govern appetite. David could walk toward Goliath while other men trembled and later become compromised by desire. Peter could sincerely love Jesus and still buckle under

fear. Elijah could stand against the prophets of Baal and later become so depleted that he wanted his life to end. These are not stories about worthless men. That is exactly why they matter. Their failures teach something that stories about obviously weak people could never teach as effectively: possessing extraordinary strength in one area does not make a person universally strong.

And then there is Solomon.

Solomon may be one of the most devastating examples because the vulnerability cannot be blamed on stupidity. Scripture makes wisdom central to his identity. In 1 Kings 3, Solomon asks God for an understanding heart and discernment, and God grants him extraordinary wisdom. His reign becomes associated with knowledge, wealth, administration, building, international reputation, and power. People travel to hear him. The Queen of Sheba comes to test him with difficult questions. First Kings describes a man whose wisdom exceeded that of those around him. If knowledge alone could make a person spiritually untouchable, Solomon should have been one of the safest men who ever lived.

He wasn't.

By 1 Kings 11, the same Solomon is described as loving many foreign women, and his wives eventually turn his heart toward other gods. The tragedy is almost impossible to miss. The wise man did not suddenly become incapable of reasoning. His intelligence was not removed from his skull. His accomplishments did not disappear. The gift remained while his allegiance deteriorated. Solomon demonstrates that a person can know more and still obey less. Wisdom can explain the trap without necessarily preventing the wise man from walking into it.

That distinction should terrify anyone who believes knowledge automatically produces discipline. Knowing that something is dangerous is not the same as being incapable of desiring it. Understanding manipulation does not make someone impossible to manipulate. Knowing the psychology of addiction does not make addiction impossible. Studying temptation does not remove temptation. Reading Scripture does not eliminate appetite. A person can explain his weakness with extraordinary sophistication while continuing to feed it.

Solomon's story therefore reveals something deeper about the way temptation works: the attack does not necessarily oppose the gift directly. It can move around the gift and approach the person carrying it.

There is little reason to attack a man's strongest wall when another gate is open.

This is where the idea of triggers becomes important. Human beings develop associations. Places, smells, songs, images, words, people, memories, emotions, environments, and rituals can produce powerful responses because the mind does not experience every moment as completely disconnected from everything that came before it. Something in the present can activate something already established within the person. Advertising understands this. Political propaganda understands this. Casinos understand this. Social-media platforms understand this. Abusive relationships can exploit it. Addictions certainly exploit it. Modern technology has become extraordinarily sophisticated at learning which stimuli produce which behaviors.

The Bible describes temptation in language that reaches the same human vulnerability from a spiritual direction. James 1 explains that a person is tempted when drawn away by his own desire and enticed. Desire conceives, and what begins internally develops into something destructive. Notice the mechanism. The vulnerability matters. Temptation has something to grab.

That means different people can be vulnerable to entirely different doors. Money may control one person and mean almost nothing to another. Sexual temptation may dominate one person's life while another is consumed by pride. Someone else cannot stop seeking approval. Another person lives for conflict. Another needs attention. Another cannot tolerate being alone. Another escapes through alcohol. Another through pornography. Another through drugs. Another through gambling. Another through food. Another through shopping. Another through work. Another through social media. Another through endless entertainment. Another becomes addicted to outrage itself, waking every morning searching for something that will make him angry enough to feel alive.

The object changes. The underlying principle does not.

This is why temptation should never be reduced to a generic list of bad things. Effective temptation is personal. What distracts one person may bore another. What destroys one person's discipline may have no meaningful power over somebody else. The opening has to correspond to the person.

Even the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4 demonstrates this precision. Jesus has fasted forty days when the temptation involving bread appears. Hunger is present. Then identity is pressed: "If thou be the Son of God." Then spectacle appears through the suggestion

that he throw himself down and force a miraculous demonstration. Then kingdoms and worldly power are placed before him. Appetite, identity, spectacle, authority. The temptations are not meaningless random acts. They intersect with the circumstances and mission of the person being tempted.

Jesus refuses the shortcuts.

That matters because temptation often offers something recognizable while corrupting the means of obtaining it. The problem is not always that the destination itself appears obviously evil. Sometimes the corruption is hidden in the route. Power without obedience. Pleasure without responsibility. Knowledge without wisdom. Spiritual experience without spiritual discipline. Wealth without stewardship. Recognition without service. Intimacy without commitment. Results without process. The shortcut is attractive precisely because it promises some version of what the person already desires while asking him to compromise something necessary to receive it correctly.

The old saying “new levels, new devils” is not a Bible verse, but the principle behind it explains something real about changing vulnerability. A person who has nothing cannot be tempted with losing status in the same way as somebody who has built an empire. A person nobody recognizes cannot be manipulated through celebrity exactly like someone whose identity has become dependent upon applause. A poor man’s pressure points may involve survival. A wealthy man’s may involve preservation, excess, ego, control, legacy, or the fear of becoming irrelevant. Success does not eliminate temptation. Success creates new things that can be threatened, worshiped, desired, protected, or abused.

This is why God's most gifted people are not automatically God's most disciplined people. Gift and government are different things. Talent determines what a person might be capable of doing. Self-government helps determine whether that capability survives his appetites long enough to mature. A person may possess a remarkable mind while being unable to control his anger. He may possess tremendous creativity while having no control over his attention. He may possess leadership ability while being addicted to praise. He may possess enormous physical discipline while being emotionally governed by lust. He may understand Scripture while secretly worshiping money. Human beings are capable of being extraordinarily developed and dangerously immature at the same time.

The Bible never allows gift to become an excuse for character.

That is one reason the stories of fallen or compromised biblical figures remain so valuable. Their failures expose the fantasy that purpose makes someone immune to temptation. If anything, purpose makes vigilance more important because there is now something meaningful to lose. The more responsibility a person carries, the farther the consequences of his disorder can travel. A private weakness can eventually become a family problem. A family problem can become a leadership problem. A leadership problem can become an institutional problem. The weakness did not grow because it became different. It grew because the person's reach grew around it.

This is also why spiritual warfare cannot become an excuse for refusing personal responsibility. Saying that temptation exists does not absolve the person who repeatedly feeds it. Recognizing principalities and powers does not mean every late bill, failed

relationship, unfinished project, bad decision, missed appointment, or unpleasant consequence should be blamed on a demon. That would destroy the very discernment spiritual warfare requires. Some problems are attacks. Some are temptations. Some are consequences. Some are responsibilities. Some are coincidences. Some are the predictable result of habits that should have been corrected years ago. Wisdom means refusing both extremes: pretending the spiritual realm does not exist and blaming the spiritual realm for everything a human being refuses to govern.

The existence of an enemy should increase responsibility, not eliminate it.

If a soldier knows where an enemy can enter, he does not respond by explaining endlessly that an enemy exists. He guards the entrance. The same principle applies to human weakness. If certain environments consistently pull a person backward, wisdom changes the environment. If a relationship repeatedly produces compromise, wisdom establishes boundaries. If a phone consumes six hours every day, wisdom stops pretending the phone is neutral merely because it fits inside a pocket. If pornography is changing someone's relationship to sexuality, the solution cannot simply be another speech about willpower while preserving unlimited access to the trigger. If alcohol repeatedly destroys judgment, constantly placing oneself around alcohol and calling resistance "strength" may simply be pride wearing the costume of discipline.

Knowing yourself means learning your gates.

This is where practical discipline and spiritual warfare meet. Prayer and action were never supposed to be enemies. Nehemiah prayed and posted guards. Biblical faith repeatedly joins dependence upon

God with responsibility in the physical world. A person can pray for deliverance while also deleting the number. He can ask God for focus while turning off notifications. He can pray against temptation while refusing to keep the temptation within arm's reach. He can seek wisdom while changing the environment that repeatedly defeats whatever wisdom he receives.

There is nothing spiritually impressive about making temptation unnecessarily convenient.

The same principle applies to distraction because distraction has become industrialized. Previous generations certainly had distractions, but modern human beings carry machines designed to compete for attention every waking hour. Notifications interrupt thought. Algorithms learn preference. Platforms measure engagement. Content never ends because an endless feed has no natural stopping point. Outrage is monetized. Sexual imagery is abundant. Comparison is constant. Entertainment follows people into bedrooms, bathrooms, workplaces, cars, restaurants, and even churches. Silence itself can begin feeling uncomfortable because the nervous system becomes accustomed to perpetual stimulation.

Under those conditions, attention cannot be treated as though it will protect itself.

A person can lose his purpose fifteen seconds at a time.

That may be one of the most effective forms of distraction because nothing feels catastrophic while it is happening. Fifteen seconds becomes five minutes. Five minutes becomes an hour. An hour becomes a daily habit. The daily habit becomes thousands of hours across a decade. Nobody stole those years in a single dramatic

event. They leaked through tiny openings that rarely felt important enough to close.

This is where the spiritual stakes become larger than productivity. The question is not merely whether somebody completed enough tasks. The deeper question is what kind of person repeated attention is creating. Whatever repeatedly receives attention begins shaping imagination. Imagination influences desire. Desire influences choices. Choices repeated become habits. Habits become character. Character influences destiny. The battle for attention therefore becomes partly a battle over formation.

What a person watches matters. What he rehearses mentally matters. What makes him angry every morning matters. What he fantasizes about matters. What voices he allows to narrate reality matters. What he repeatedly laughs at matters. What he normalizes matters. What he cannot stop checking matters. None of these things necessarily controls a person instantly. Formation usually works through accumulation.

So does deterioration.

Solomon did not wake up one morning as the wisest king on earth and randomly decide that everything he once believed no longer mattered. First Kings describes a turning of the heart. That language is important because hearts often turn gradually. Compromise becomes tolerable before it becomes normal. What once produced conviction becomes familiar. What becomes familiar stops feeling dangerous. What stops feeling dangerous becomes easier to repeat. Eventually the person may still possess the language of his former convictions while living according to an entirely different hierarchy of desires.

That is why people should be careful about believing they would recognize their own corruption immediately. Most people imagine temptation at the final stage. They picture the destroyed marriage, the addiction, the public scandal, the abandoned faith, the ruined career. But the final stage is rarely where the battle began. The battle began when something small became permissible. It continued when permissible became repeated. Repetition became attachment. Attachment began negotiating with conviction. By the time consequences became visible, the internal argument may have been happening for years.

The same is true of purpose. People imagine abandoning their calling as a dramatic declaration: "I quit." But many callings are never abandoned that cleanly. They are postponed. Tomorrow. Monday. Next month. After things settle down. After the children get older. After the relationship improves. After more money comes in. After motivation returns. After another season of the show. After one more night out. After one more scroll. The person never announces that the dream is dead. He simply keeps rescheduling its life.

Eventually tomorrow becomes a graveyard.

That is why discouragement deserves to be understood alongside temptation. Temptation pulls someone toward something. Discouragement pushes someone away from something. Both can interrupt purpose. A person can know exactly what he should do and become so exhausted by resistance that he stops believing doing it is worth the cost. He may still believe in the gift. He may still believe in God. He may still believe the mission matters. What disappears is endurance.

This is where the biblical idea of perseverance becomes essential. Scripture does not describe faithful people as people who never encounter resistance. It repeatedly assumes resistance. Endurance only has meaning because something makes continuing difficult. Faithfulness is not demonstrated by possessing a calling when the calling feels exciting. It is demonstrated by continuing to answer it after excitement has been replaced by responsibility.

And sometimes the most important form of discipline is simply returning.

People often imagine discipline as uninterrupted perfection. That standard can itself become discouraging because human beings inevitably lose focus, make mistakes, become tired, get tempted, waste time, misjudge situations, and occasionally move backward. If discipline means never being knocked off course, almost everyone eventually concludes that he lacks discipline. A better measure is how difficult someone becomes to keep off course.

Distract him and he returns. Discourage him and he returns. Tempt him and, even if he stumbles, he recognizes the opening and closes it. Expose a weakness and he builds protection around it. Show him that an environment is corrupting him and he changes the environment. Show him that pride keeps producing the same mistake and he stops defending the pride. He becomes increasingly difficult to hold anywhere except where he has decided he belongs.

The victory is not becoming someone who can never be distracted.

The victory is becoming someone who cannot be kept distracted.

That distinction changes spiritual warfare from paranoia into discipline. The objective is not to spend every waking hour hunting for invisible enemies behind ordinary events. The objective is to become more discerning about what governs attention, appetite, identity, relationships, time, and obedience. It is to understand that a person's greatest vulnerability may not attack his gift directly. It may simply keep giving the gift something else to do.

A gifted writer can spend his life arguing instead of writing. A gifted musician can become more committed to intoxication than music. A gifted businessman can acquire wealth and become owned by the wealth he acquired. A gifted preacher can become addicted to applause. A gifted athlete can conquer his body while failing to govern his ego. A gifted thinker can spend decades consuming information without producing anything of his own. Every one of them can remain gifted. That is what makes the tragedy possible.

The enemy does not necessarily need the gift.

He needs access to the person carrying it.

Solomon's life remains one of Scripture's great warnings because it refuses to let wisdom become a shield against this reality. A person can know and still wander. He can understand and still compromise. He can possess extraordinary discernment and still develop attachments that overpower what he knows. The lesson is not that wisdom is worthless. The lesson is that wisdom must become practice. Knowledge must become discipline. Discernment must become boundaries. Faith must become obedience. Otherwise a person can spend his life accurately describing the road while walking in the opposite direction.

Perhaps that is why the strongest spiritual soldiers are not the people who boast that nothing can reach them. The dangerous ones are the people who know exactly where they are vulnerable and guard those places accordingly. They understand that strength does not require pretending weakness does not exist. They know that recognizing a trigger gives them an opportunity to remove its power. They know that temptation exposed is easier to confront than temptation disguised as harmless pleasure. They know that purpose requires protection because the world will happily consume every unguarded hour.

Most importantly, they understand that the battle is not won merely by discovering what they were called to do. Plenty of people discover gifts they never discipline themselves enough to develop. Plenty glimpse purpose and then trade it piece by piece for comfort, appetite, distraction, approval, resentment, entertainment, or fear. The harder victory is remaining aligned long enough for calling to become completed work.

The enemy does not always have to make a person worship him. Sometimes it is enough to keep the person too distracted to worship God properly. He does not always have to make someone hate his family. Sometimes it is enough to keep him staring at a screen while his family grows up around him. He does not always have to convince someone that his gift is worthless. Sometimes it is enough to keep him endlessly preparing to use it. He does not always have to destroy the mission.

Sometimes he only has to delay it until the person carrying it runs out of tomorrows.

That is why guarding attention is not a small thing. Guarding appetite is not a small thing. Guarding relationships, environments, habits, thoughts, and time is not a small thing. These are the gates through which a life is continuously being shaped. The person who refuses to guard them may remain enormously gifted while becoming increasingly incapable of directing the gift toward what God intended.

God's best soldiers are not dangerous because they cannot fall. Scripture destroys that fantasy repeatedly. They are dangerous because of what they can become when wisdom, obedience, discipline, and purpose finally move together.

The gift may have been given.

The battle is over what happens to the person carrying it.