

NEIL T. ANDERSON
& DAVE PARK

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BREAKER**
YOUTH EDITION



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You Don't Have to Live in the Shadows

ONE

I (NEIL) REMEMBER COUNSELING a young Christian who was in deep spiritual, mental, and emotional confusion. At one point before I began meeting with her, she wrote the following prayer, then ten minutes later tried unsuccessfully to kill herself with an overdose of pills:

Dear God,

Where are you? How can you watch and not help me? I hurt so bad, and you don't even care. If you cared you'd make it stop or let me die. I love you, but you seem so far away. I can't hear you or feel you or see you, but I'm supposed to believe you're here. Lord, I feel them and hear them. They are here. I know you're real, God, but they are more real to me right now. Please make someone believe me, Lord. Why won't you make it stop? Please, Lord, please! If you love me you'll let me die.

—A Lost Sheep

We have met hundreds of young Christians like the one who wrote this sad note. Most of them didn't attempt suicide as this one did, but many of them talked about dark desires to do so. And nearly all of them admitted to the presence of "them"—inner urges or voices that bothered them, tempted and taunted them, accused them, or threatened them.

The fact that people struggle with negative or opposing thoughts is well accepted. We often caution young people who make appointments to talk with us that they may have opposing thoughts such as, "Don't go; they can't help you." Or distracting thoughts will pop into their minds, such as, "I don't want to go" or "I've tried this before and it didn't work." One person wrote to Neil: "Every time I try to talk to you, or even think about talking to you, I completely shut down. Voices inside literally yell at me: 'No!' I've even considered killing myself to end this terrible battle going on inside. I need help!"

Over the years, wherever we go we have surveyed Christian high school students, asking them "Have you heard 'voices' in your head like there was a subconscious self talking to you, or have you struggled with really bad thoughts?" Seventy percent answered yes! If you struggle with tempting or accusing thoughts in your head, you're not alone. You may not have told anyone about your experiences because you fear that people would think you're a mental case. Maybe you have kept quiet because *you* think you're crazy. Maybe you have been taught that Christians can't have these kinds of problems.

But the time has come for us to wake up to the fact that Satan is real and that demons exist. If you hear tormenting voices in your head or feel a dark presence in your room at night (and 47 percent of those students we've surveyed have), you're not crazy; you're under attack. You need to

know how to defend yourself against Satan's fiery darts. That's what this book is all about.

Many Christians don't complain about hearing voices, but their minds are filled with such confusion that their daily walk with Christ is completely discouraging. When they try to pray, they begin thinking about a million things they should be doing. When they sit down to read the Bible or a good Christian book, they can't concentrate. When they have an opportunity to serve the Lord in some way, they give up because of thoughts of self-doubt: "I'm not a strong Christian"; "I don't know enough about the Bible"; "I'm too young"; "I have too many sinful thoughts." Instead of being victorious, dynamic Christians full of joy, they trudge through life under a cloud, just trying to hang on until Jesus comes. Some of this discouragement is certainly because of our own faulty thinking, but it can also reflect deception from the enemy.

Common Misconceptions About Bondage

Where do the evil voices, bad thoughts, guilty feelings, and confusion come from? One of the main reasons so many youth are in bondage today is because they don't know the answers to these questions. They are living under a number of misconceptions about the spiritual world that must be corrected. Here is what some Christians falsely believe—and Satan loves it.

1. *Demons were busy when Christ was on earth, but they're not around much today.* Young Christians who believe this after reading what God's Word says and seeing what is going on in the world today are not facing the facts. The New Testament clearly says that believers will wrestle "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this

darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). Paul goes on to describe every piece of spiritual armor we are to put on in order to defend ourselves against “the flaming arrows of the evil one” (verses 13-17). If dark spiritual powers are no longer attacking believers, why would Paul warn us about them and insist that we arm ourselves against them?

The powers and forces that Paul wrote about are still around today. You can see it around your school. How many kids do you know who are involved in New Age practices, Ouija boards, astrology, occult games like Magic, music with evil lyrics, or evil Internet activities or video games?

The kingdom of darkness is still present, and Satan wants to make our lives miserable and keep us from walking strong and tall in Christ. If you don’t believe that Satan and his demons are present and busy, then either God or you will have to take a bum rap for all the evil Satan is dumping on you and the rest of the world.

2. *What early Christians called demonic activity is only mental illness.* If one of your friends were to report hearing inner voices or sensing a dark presence in his room, most secular counselors would say, “He has a mental problem; he’s paranoid.” Very few would think it’s a spiritual problem, the activity of Satan’s demons. Why? Because a natural explanation is the best such counselors can do without a belief in God or the existence of Satan. The secular world’s understanding of our problems is simply incomplete. It ignores the reality of the spiritual world.

Not all physical, mental, and emotional problems young Christians experience are specifically demonic. But ignoring the presence and influence of Satan and his demons will leave many problems unsolved.

3. *Some problems are psychological and some are spiritual.*

This false belief suggests that the human soul and spirit are separate, which isn't true. There is no problem that isn't psychological, because there is never a time when our mind, emotions, and will are not involved. And there is no problem that isn't spiritual, because there is no time when God is not present or when it is safe for us to take off the armor of God.

Saying that a problem is only psychological overlooks how God and Satan are involved. Saying that a problem is only spiritual ignores our responsibility for how we must think, feel, and choose. In order to deal with our inner conflicts we must consider both the psychological and spiritual influences that are at work.

4. *Christians can't be affected by demonic forces.* This is a lie that the devil would love us to swallow so we will drop our defenses against him. If Satan can't touch Christians, why are we told to put on the armor of God, to resist the devil, to stand firm, and to be alert? If we can't be deceived by Satan, why does Paul talk about our relationship to the powers of darkness as a wrestling match? Those who say the enemy can't influence us are the ones who are most vulnerable to him.

5. *The activity of demons is only seen in weird behavior or gross sin.* There are still cases of demon activity today like the wild demon-possessed man called "Legion" in Luke 8:26-39. But most young Christians under spiritual attack lead fairly normal lives while experiencing serious inner problems for which no natural cause or solution has been found. Because they think that satanic attack is involved only in the cases of only mass murderers or violent sex criminals, these ordinary people wonder what's wrong with them and why they can't just "do better."

Satan's first and best strategy is deception. Paul warned: "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is

not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14,15). It is not the few weird or violent people who are the main problem. Rather, it is Satan’s subtle deception and invasion of the lives of “normal” believers like us that keeps us from being effective.

6. *Freedom from spiritual bondage is the result of a power encounter with demonic forces.* Freedom from spiritual problems and bondage does not result from a power encounter; it results from a *truth* encounter. Satan is a liar, and he will work undercover at all costs. But the truth of God’s Word exposes him and his lies. His demons are like cockroaches that scurry for the shadows when the light comes on. Satan’s power is in the lie, and when his lie is exposed by the truth, his plans are foiled. Satan’s power was broken at the cross. He is a defeated foe.

Then how can he be so effective? Let me illustrate with a story from childhood.

When I (Neil) was a boy growing up in the country, my dad, my brother, and I would visit our neighbor’s farm. The neighbor had a yappy little dog that scared the socks off me. When it came barking around the corner, my dad and brother stood their ground, but I ran. Guess who the dog chased! I escaped to the top of our pickup truck while the little dog yapped at me from the ground.

Everyone except me could see that the little dog had no power over me except what I gave it by not standing up to it. The dog had no power to throw me up on the pickup; it was my belief that put me up there. That dog controlled me by using my mind, my emotions, my will, and my muscles, all of which were motivated by fear. Finally I gathered up my courage, jumped off the pickup, and kicked a small rock at the mutt. And it ran!

Satan is like that yappy little dog: He deceives us into fearing him more than God. His power is in the lie. He is the

father of lies (John 8:44) who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). As a result, the whole world is under the influence of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

The devil can do nothing about who you are in Christ. But if he can deceive you into believing his lies about you and God, you will spend a lot of time on top of the pickup truck! You don't have to outshout him or outmuscle him to be free of his control. You just have to *out-truth* him. *Believe, declare, and act upon the truth of God's Word*, and you will ruin Satan's strategy.

This concept has had a dramatic effect on our counseling. Often when a spiritual conflict was exposed in someone being counseled, it would turn into a power encounter. The person would become unconscious, run out of the room, or start behaving like he or she was crazy. Our usual first approach was to get the demon to expose itself, then command it to leave. This process was often very difficult for the person we were trying to help. And though progress was made, the process would usually have to be repeated.

We have learned from the Bible and from our experience that *truth* is what sets people free. The power of Satan is in the lie, and the power of the believer is in knowing the truth. We are to pursue the truth that sets us free.

Also, people who are in bondage are not liberated by what the counselor does but by what *they* do. It's not what Neil or Dave or your pastor or youth leader believes that breaks Satan's grip on your life, it's what *you* believe. And what you believe must be the truth. Notice the following verses:

You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32 NIV).

[Jesus said,] "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13).

[Jesus prayed to the Father,] “I’m not asking you to take them [Christians] out of the world, but to keep them safe from Satan’s power....Make them pure and holy through teaching them your words of truth” (John 17:15,17 TLB).

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist (Ephesians 6:14 NIV).

Finally, brethren, whatever is true...let your mind dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8).

When God first disciplined the early church, as recorded in Acts 5, He did so in a dramatic way. Two people dropped dead when their sin was discovered. What was the issue: drugs, sex? No, the issue was *truth*. Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira: “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (verse 3). God wanted the church to know that Satan the deceiver can ruin us if he can get us to believe and live a lie. That’s why it is so important to take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Setting Captives Free

Before Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, God empowered Him and His hand-picked disciples to take authority over demonic powers in the world. But something radical happened at the cross and in the resurrection that permanently changed the way we encounter spiritual forces.

First, Jesus’ death and resurrection defeated and disarmed the rulers and authorities of the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 2:15). Before the cross, “all authority...in heaven and on earth” had not yet been given to Christ. But Matthew

28:18 assures us that the resurrected Christ now has all authority. Because of the cross, Satan is defeated, and he has no authority over those who are in Christ. Believing the truth of Christ's victory and Satan's defeat is the first step to successfully putting down the enemy's attempts to discourage and hassle you.

Second, in Christ's death and resurrection every believer is made alive with Him and is now seated with Him (Ephesians 2:5,6). You no longer need someone else—like a pastor or youth leader—to take authority over Satan for you. You now reside in Jesus Christ, who has all authority. In order to resist the devil, you need to understand and exercise your position and authority in Christ.

Freedom is your inheritance as a Christian. That's why Paul wrote:

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can see something of the future he has called you to share. I want you to realize that God has been made rich because we who are Christ's have been given to him! I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in heaven, far, far above any other king or ruler or dictator or leader. Yes, his honor is far more glorious than that of anyone else either in this world or the world to come (Ephesians 1:18-21 TLB).

When Satan harasses you, you may want to crawl under a rock in misery, like the girl whose prayer note opened this chapter. You may cry out for God to deliver you, like Jesus miraculously and instantly delivered the demonized people

in the Gospels. But your deliverance has already been accomplished because of Christ's work on the cross and His resurrection. That's the good news Paul was trying to tell us about in his prayer. Since you are with Christ in the light, you never again need to live in the shadows.

But it is your responsibility to choose the truth and resist the devil. From your position in Christ, you must resist the devil, renounce (which means to turn your back on) any ways by which you have participated in his schemes, confess your sin, and forgive those who have offended you. These critical Steps to Freedom in Christ are the focus of Part Three of this book.

The woman who called herself "A Lost Sheep" in the letter at the beginning of this chapter finally gained God's view of her condition. Four years after she wrote her desperate prayer, she wrote this response based on her new understanding of God's provision for her in Christ. Her words are based on Scripture. Allow them to shine some light into the shadows of your life.

My Dear Lost Sheep,

You ask me where I am. My child, I am with you and I always will be. You are weak, but in me you are strong. I love you so much that I can't let you die. I am so close that I feel everything you feel.

I know what you are going through, for I am going through it with you. But I have set you free and you must stand firm. You do not need to die physically for my enemies to be gone, but be crucified with me and I will live in you, and you shall live with me. I will direct you in paths of righteousness. My child, I love you and I will never forsake you, for you are truly mine.

—Love, God

Truth Encounter

Read

Read:

John 8:32; John 14:6; John 16:13

Reflect

Reflect:

1. Could you relate to the Christians in this chapter who felt spiritually oppressed? What experiences have you had?
2. Have you been exposed to any of the misconceptions talked about in this chapter? Did you accept any of them as true? How did those misconceptions affect your life?
3. Do you feel you fully understand how to use your authority in Christ and resist the devil? What are some ways you can learn more about your authority in Christ?
4. Do you ever feel that your personal walk with Christ is incomplete or that you're not growing? In what ways?

Respond

Respond:

Take a few moments to pray, and ask the Lord to reveal to your mind any misconceptions that you might have about bondages or the spiritual world around us. Ask the Lord to replace any deceptions you might have with His truth. Ask Him to help you grow in your understanding of who you are in Christ.