

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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THE RESISTANCE

What is the Holy Spirit currently convicting you to change in your life?

What are the circumstances the devil might use to tempt you to continue in this current way?

What powers of the Spirit will you need to resist those temptations and make the change?

Are you willing to believe He has given them to you and live like that's true?

James 4:7-10 – ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

I) Take a Side...

We like to keep our options open. This is a product of uncertainty. A better option may be presented, new information may change our mind, a once-future event has now completed. While waiting, it is common to become comfortable not deciding. This transformation leads us to make excuses to put off deciding even after we have all the relevant information. This is a consequence of the devil's original deception, that there is no absolute truth, only a subjective truth defined by our feelings and circumstances. God has revealed His Truth, wills that we love His Truth, and expects that once we know His Truth, we decide whether to accept it or reject it. God demands that we take a side.

◆ **Decide:** The Bible commands us to "Submit yourselves therefore to God (James 4:7)." This is the end of the progression of blessings

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flowing from the works of Jesus. The Truth is revealed in His life, death, and resurrection. We are invited to test the Truth. Jesus also tests us and whether we love His Truth once we have proved it. Finally, He declares we know enough and must decide. The Truth is that we are not God but are privileged to express Him through our lives. Loving Jesus's Truth is to choose to reveal God by living according to His will.

◆ **Outlast:** Submission to God requires that we resist the temptations of the devil. There is another fact about our enemy given to us in this command. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (v7)." The devil is inconsistent, conditional, fickle, and weak. He can lie to us, he can manipulate our circumstances, but he cannot destroy us. When we are resolved to submit to God and embrace our life's purpose, the devil cannot defeat us, and he will retreat. Too often, our response to life's turbulence is to examine our own weakness and question our endurance. God has given us the cheat code to live the life we want. Do not search for our own breaking point, but that of the devil. When we submit to God with the conviction of faith, he will flee.

II) Take a Stand...

Many align with a side in some contentious conflict but do so from the comfortable vantage of an observer offering moral support. We think cheering for our side is the same as doing something. Life is not a spectacle and there is no option to sit it out. When we do not do what God wills, even if we do not actively disobey, we are not living in submission to His will and are without His power. The promise that the devil will flee is conditioned on our submission to God and His purpose for us. We have not taken a side if we do not also take a stand.

◆ **Avoid distraction:** The idea that we are battling the devil is itself a bit of a distraction. Our objective is not to defeat Satan. It is to be restored into the image of God. Satan's desire is to prevent this, so he is our adversary. But chasing Him distracts us from our mission. Instead, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (v8)." The Holy Spirit is our strength to resist the devil, given to us by the grace of God who makes the path for us to return to Him. This is the joy of Palm Sunday, the procession of the One who makes possible our victory. We who once were apathetic or resistant to God are told "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded (v8)," acts of resistance against the devil's deceptions.

◆ **Be changed:** We cannot deny our part of the Truth. We have rejected our purpose and attempted to live according to false gods. It is evident as we struggle to live according to what we now know. Love of an enemy, contentment in poverty, joy in sadness, restraint in the heat of the moment. None have navigated the path without faltering. We are told to "Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection (v9)." Taking a stand against what we once supported is to let our hearts and minds reinterpret what is joyful and grievous.

III) Take Your Place...

We each have a place reserved in the kingdom of heaven. A place designated by God. Taking our place requires submitting to His authority and accepting His choice of our placement. This is part of the process of being restored to His purpose for our lives. Central to our struggle is the unconscious drive to be our own authority, deciding what we are and where we rank. Taking our place in the order of beings is vacating the delusion that we have any power to decide where we fit. When we accept this, we discover it is a blessing to finally give up the effort of pretending to be what we are not.

◆ **Under God:** The simplest way to explain our spiritual predicament is that we have been pretending to be our own god. We have been subjectively defining truth, deciding the moral code by which we should live, where we fit into society, and how to control those around us to conform to our expectations. God's Truth annihilates this illusion, restoring us to our reality of a beloved creature with a predefined purpose. To "Humble yourselves before the Lord (v10)," is to accept that He is God. We obey His will because it fits us perfectly. He designed us to fit His plan precisely.

◆ **Lifted by God:** The acts of drawing near to God and being cleansed of our old ways are part of the restoration He performs throughout our Christian life. Some of us have tried and failed to make the devil flee. He outlasted our resistance. The Truth is that the devil flees the presence of the Holy Spirit. We cannot exalt ourselves but "He will exalt you (v10)." It is tempting to believe we must purify our own heart, identify every sinful thought, and purge them all. We will fail. Instead, be led by the Spirit. When He convicts you of impurity, He does so with the offer to help you resist it. Our hope is the faith that when He inspires resistance, He is faithful to chase Satan away. Take a side, take a stand, and live confidently in faith that God is leading the resistance.