

## DON'T GET SACKED

33rd in a Series on Ephesians called, "Messages to the Misfits"  
Ephesians 6:11

You may recall a strange but true story that came out a number of years ago. It was reported first by the Reuters News Agency. According to the report the dazed crew of a Japanese fishing trawler was rescued from the Sea of Japan when they were found clinging to the wreckage of their sunken ship. After investigators interviewed the crew they were all put in prison. That's because to a man the sailors all told the same story about what had happened to their boat. They claimed that on a clear, calm day, a cow fell out of the blue sky, struck their ship amidships and shattered its hull, causing it to sink in minutes. Right. In the middle of the ocean on a clear day the sailors hear that sound long dreaded by all mariners... "Moo!" Then a cow falls onto their ship and sinks it. It's hardly surprising that the investigators found that story to be more than a little suspect. But why would anyone make up such a tale? Who would think anyone would believe it? Of course there was suspicion that the crew was somehow responsible for the loss of the ship. Maybe they'd somehow caused an explosion or something.

Several weeks later, however, the truth finally did come out. The Russian Air Force reluctantly informed Japanese authorities that a crew of one of its cargo planes had apparently stolen a cow that they found wandering at the edge of the Siberian airfield they were preparing to take off from. They forced the cow into the cargo hold of their plane and took off for their home base. However, they weren't prepared for the fact that the cow freaked out as they were flying over the Sea of Japan. They had no way to manage a frightened cow rampaging around the hold and were afraid that it was going to damage the airplane and cause it to crash. In order to save the airplane and their own lives they opened the cargo door and shoved the animal out of the aircraft as they flew at 30,000 feet. Against all odds the unfortunate bovine made a direct hit on the fishing vessel six miles below!

Despite that incident no sailors worry about protecting their vessels and themselves from attack by falling cows when they are at sea. Obviously there was no way the sailors on that trawler could ever have anticipated what happened to them. Wise sailors do take precautions to protect themselves from dangers that are common and well known. Today I am going to recommend that we do the same. When we talk about spiritual war there are some people, anxious to gain an audience, that talk about supposed threats that are attention getting, but in fact are less of a threat to us than having a cow fall out of the sky onto us. There are, however, dangers that are very real, ones we need to be aware of. We will think about that today as we look at Ephesians 6:11.

## WE MUST BE AWARE OF OUR ENEMY

This verse says that we are to take a stand against the devil's schemes. That begins with understanding that we have an enemy who is trying to do us harm. We saw this last week, but it is important to remind ourselves of who our enemy actually is. Paul calls him the devil here, but the Bible uses several names for him. We are all familiar with the name Satan. That name is from

Hebrew and it simply means enemy or opponent. He's *not* on our side. He is also known as the devil as Paul calls him here. The Greek word is diabolos, and it means slanderer. It depicts him as someone who is ever maligning us. At times he is called the "accuser" of the brothers and sisters. He is also referred to at times as Abaddon or Apollyon, both of which mean "destroyer," which gives us an idea of what he is all about. He is known also as Lucifer, which means "shining one." That's probably a reference to the fact that as Paul wrote elsewhere he likes to appear as an angel of light, when in fact he is the absolute opposite.

Satan is a created being. While he is powerful and exceedingly smart and crafty, he is finite, and he can be resisted and defeated. He is not all powerful, he is not all knowing, and he is not omnipresent. He cannot read your thoughts, but he knows exactly how your mind works.

Wait a minute. You believe in an invisible, evil being who is creating havoc in the world and in our lives? That's awfully superstitious, isn't it? That kind of thing has no business in our modern world, right? When I think about this I remember the old story of a boxer who goes out in the first round and just gets pummeled by his opponent. His aides in the corner patch him up between rounds, encourage him and give him a few tips, telling him to try to stay away from his opponent. He goes out for the second round and if anything, it's worse. He barely survives, so when the bell rings ending that round he staggers back to his corner, drops on to his stool, shakes his head and says, "That's it. I'm done. Throw in the towel." His trainer says, "What are you talking about? This guy can't lay a glove on you." And the boxer says, "Then somebody needs to keep a close eye on that ref, because somebody out there is killing me."

Somebody out there is killing us, and we all know it. Why is life so hard? Why does it seem like doing good is always difficult? Where is all this opposition coming from? It comes from Satan, the opponent, the destroyer. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 8:44. Speaking to his opponents Jesus said, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

There is some very important truth in those words. First, he says that the devil is very real. He is very much alive and at work in this world, and his work influences what is happening in our lives. Jesus believed and taught that the devil is quite real and is a factor in events in this world. Notice that people can belong to the devil. That doesn't mean they are demon possessed and their heads can spin around completely on their necks. It just means that Satan is using them to accomplish his schemes. Sadly, just as Jesus encountered people who are actually being used by Satan, so will we.

Second, notice that Jesus said Satan is a murderer. As I said, he is called the destroyer. He is a twisted being, whose whole existence is focused on ruining anything having to do with God.

Everything he does relating to us is intended to inflict pain and loss on us, and to destroy our souls and our lives. We really cannot imagine the level of malice and hatred that exists in him.

Third, observe that Satan is a liar. You get a glimpse here again of Jesus' sense of humor. When Satan lies, he's speaking his native language. In case you didn't catch it, that was a joke. It was a joke that communicates truth. Jesus said there is no truth in him. You literally cannot trust a single word that comes out of Satan, for everything he says is a calculated lie. How do you know if the devil is lying? Well, his lips are moving.

When I was in college proving my ineptitude as a baseball player, there was one game during which I encountered what had to be the most loquacious opposing player I ever ran into. He was the catcher on a team we played. He talked to everybody who came to bat. He never stopped talking. My first time up he said, "Hey, how you doing? How's your season going?" I said, "Pretty well." I left it at that, because I needed to concentrate on the at bat. But he started talking all about how he was doing, how their team was doing and everything else under the sun. He talked through the entire at bat, almost without pausing. My second time up he started up again, but as I prepared for the second pitch of that at bat he said, "Hey, you seem like a nice guy. I'm going to help you out. I'm calling for a curve on this pitch. The problem is this pitcher can't throw a curve for a strike to save his life. So this pitch is going to be a ball, I guarantee it. Don't swing." Well what do you do with that? I tried to ignore it, but sure enough the next pitch was a curve ball and it was well out of the strike zone. He had told me the truth. Late in the game I came to bat at a critical moment. It was a tie game at that point and we had a runner in scoring position on second base, so this was a potentially important point of the game. The catcher kept up his usual chatter, but as I waited for the third pitch of this at bat he said, "Hey, here's a big tip. I think you're a good guy, so I'm calling for a fast ball right over the plate. This is going to be your pitch to hit." I realized that he was messing with my mind. Was he telling me the truth? But why would he help me that way? That would just help us potentially win the game. Maybe he figured I would think that he was trying to get me to think that he was lying to me so that I would think it surely wouldn't be a fast ball, I'd look for a breaking ball or changeup, and it actually would be a fast ball. Or maybe he figured I would trust him because he'd told me the truth before, and now I'd look for a fast ball but it would actually be a curve. I asked for time out from the umpire, stepped out of the batter's box and signaled to our third base coach to run through the signs again as though I had missed the signs. I hadn't. I just needed some time to clear my head. I realized the catcher had gotten just what he wanted. He was in my head. He wanted me to be thinking all about whether I could trust him or not rather than to just focus on the coming pitch. I realized the one thing I could know for a fact was that he was not trying to help me, he was trying to mess me up. He was on the other team, and he wanted me to fail! So I had to clear my head, just forget about him, and think about the next pitch. It was hard though, because there is no way to unhear something you've heard.

I needed to focus on the fact that no matter what he might say, that guy did not want me to succeed, and he was doing everything he could think of to see to it that I failed. We need to realize that Satan is out there and that he wants us to fail. He wants us to hurt, to be miserable and to die. Everything he does and says is aimed at that end. We should not trust anything coming from him.

But how do we know what is actually coming from him rather than from some other source? Fortunately, we can have a pretty good idea because he has some methods and messages that he has been using for centuries, and he never really varies from them. So when we run into these things we can know they're coming from the enemy. So what does he say? What comes from him?

### WE MUST BE AWARE OF THE ENEMY'S SCHEMES

At the end of 2 Corinthians 2:11 Paul said, "For we are not unaware of his (Satan's) schemes." Um, unfortunately Paul, we are often unaware of the enemy's schemes. We don't notice what he's doing. That's a dangerous place to be. We shouldn't be unaware of Satan's schemes. He doesn't have secret plans or a secret playbook. He's like an old football coach who has been running the same offense for decades. Satan has the same playbook that he has been using since humans showed up on the planet. His schemes are thousands of years old. There are no new schemes, just newer versions and variations of the same old ones. It's just that his age old offense is very effective and he executes it perfectly. It turns out that he has two main schemes that he employs, and they are closely tied to each other.

### DOUBT

First the enemy tries to get you to doubt what God says. You see this the first time Satan shows up in the Bible. It is a familiar scene. Adam and Eve are in a perfect environment in Eden. They had everything that human life should offer. There is no fear, no death, just peace, joy and plenty. Then Satan shows up. The existence of such joy, such peace, such beauty, is unbearable to him. He seeks to foul everything good and beautiful. He is determined, as he always is, to utterly ruin it. God had told the first two humans that they could do whatever they wanted and eat whatever they wanted, but just don't eat fruit from one particular tree. It wasn't that the fruit from that tree was inherently evil. We have no idea what kind of tree it was. For sake of illustration let's say it was a banana tree. There were other banana trees. Just don't eat the bananas from this one particular tree over here. This was all about one thing. Would they do what God told them to do?

Satan shows up in Genesis 3:1 and says, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" No, he didn't say that. There are hundreds, thousands of trees. Help yourself. Just don't eat the bananas from that one tree. Eve does correct that lie, but she sort of gets into the spirit of the thing. She says in verse 3, "God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" No, Eve, he didn't say

that. He said nothing about touching it. Nevertheless, she was correct that death would be the consequence for disobeying.

Then Satan says in verse 4, “You will not certainly die.” He directly attacked what God said. God is lying to you. You won’t die. He’s just trying to scare you, and what he says is just plain not true. That is one of the devil’s most frequently employed attacks. “Oh, come on, you can’t believe what the *Bible* says. It’s just a book written by people. It’s full of errors and contradictions.” “You can’t believe that book. It was written thousands of years ago by unsophisticated people. It doesn’t apply at all to life in modern society.” “You believe that God became a man, died after being executed, then came back to life? That’s just dumb. You’d have to be an idiot to believe that.” “Jesus said you have to deny yourself in order to find life? Well everybody knows that’s wrong. If you really want to live then indulge yourself. That’s when life gets exciting and fun.”

Phillip Pullman is an award winning British writer. He was the author of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, including *The Golden Compass*, that are now being made into a series by HBO. He is an outspoken opponent of Christianity, but he recognizes the reality of the spiritual war. In an essay in his collection, *Daemon Voices*, he wrote, “There are two great powers...and they’ve been fighting since time began. Every advance in human life, every scrap of knowledge and wisdom and decency we have has been torn by one side from the teeth of the other. Every little increase in human freedom has been fought over ferociously between those who want us to know more and be wiser and stronger, and those who want us to obey and be humble and submit.” Does that sound familiar? He claims that freedom, wisdom and strength come from refusing to obey, be humble and submit. Submit to whom? To God! Freedom comes from fighting against him! Satan said in Genesis 3:5, “God knows when you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God!” Pullman could have been quoting him. He admits there is a war on, and claims, as Satan did, that real freedom, real strength, real knowledge and wisdom, come from rebelling against God!

But Satan doesn’t stop with doubting what God says. His real goal is to get us to doubt God’s character. In Genesis 3:5 after denying what God said about them dying if they disobeyed, he went on. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” In other words, something really good is going to happen to you if you eat this fruit, and God is trying to keep you from having it. That’s because God is not good. He is not looking out for you and does not want the best for you. In fact, he is untrustworthy and selfish, trying to keep the good just for himself. This is an all-out attack on the very character of God. *Satan wanted to convince the first humans that God is not to be trusted.*

That is still one of his most common strategies. He employs it continually. The way he frequently employs it is to batter us with disappointments, hardships and painful losses, in an effort to get us to feel like God has let us down. Satan wants nothing more than for us to think that God should

have helped us in some way and he did nothing. The enemy wants us to be convinced we can't trust God.

I think of this as the Job strategy. In Job 1 God boasted to Satan about Job, whom he claimed was "blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." In verse 9 Satan says, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" He goes on to essentially say, "Sure he trusts you, because you give him everything he could possibly want. He knows which side of the bread the butter is on." Then he says in verse 11, "But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." That is exactly what Satan believes. He thinks the only reason anyone would ever trust and honor God is that God buys them off. He gives them all the good stuff in life. He thinks if for one minute God gives someone unpleasant circumstances they will turn on God in a heartbeat. Job proved him wrong when everything in his life absolutely blew up. But at least he had his health. In chapter 2 Satan insisted that if God took that, why then Job would turn on God. In verse 8 he said if God robbed him of his health Job would "surely curse you to your face." Satan believes that if he can make life hard enough for us we will quit believing God.

If I don't think God really exists, or if I don't think he is inclined to act in my best interest and bring about good for me, then I'm not going to trust him, and if I don't trust him I'm surely not going to concern myself with doing what he tells me to do. Have you rented a car? When you go through that process you know it's always more complicated than you wish it were. Part of the reason for that is the rental car company is going to try to upsell you. They often will offer you a more expensive car than you plan to rent. Then they offer you extra insurance coverage that you can buy, usually two different options. Finally there is the gas issue. They prominently display the average local gas price and tell you that you can have them fill up the tank when you bring the car back, but at a price that is outrageously high, or you can pay for a full tank right that moment at a price lower than the local average, or you can bring the car back with its tank already filled. I know that in every instance they are trying to sell me something because they will make more money that way. I know for certain they are not offering me these options because they are looking out for my best interests. In other words, because I know their primary motive is not to look out for me, I don't trust them. I usually just say no thanks because I'm going to look out for me, knowing they won't. And that's what can easily happen in our relationship with God. It is what Satan is trying to make happen when he assails us with doubt about God's character.

I think about people in our church and can see the enemy doing his very best to pummel them into giving up on God. He is hit them with Parkinson's Disease, cancer, a stubborn brain tumor. Now in our family we are dealing with a condition that our granddaughter Cara has that the doctor has said will affect her for the rest of her life. We don't know what all the effects will be, but we know it has already made life difficult for her, and could get worse. We all feel so helpless before these onslaughts, and it is so easy to wonder, "Where are you, Lord?"

Not long ago Laurie and I had a very discouraging day. That night I woke up in the middle of the night and found myself assailed with discouragement. Everything that had been discouraging that day in my mind was going to turn into a worst case scenario. The future looked foreboding and depressing, and I had no answers. I wished I could just turn it all off and go back to sleep, but that simply wasn't happening. After quite some time I finally asked the right question. I asked myself, "Where is this all coming from?" Is God the source of all this discouragement, all these doubts, all these foreboding thoughts? As soon as I asked the question I knew what was going on. This was not coming from God. I was under attack. Satan was trying to hammer me, trying to destroy my heart, trying to beat me up so that I would curl up into the fetal position, suck my thumb and just quit. He wanted me to turn into a pathetic bundle of self-pity. The spiritual war was raging, and it was amazingly easy to fail to be aware of that fact. But as soon as I realized that this was all coming from the enemy, when I saw what he was trying to do, I started feeling better.

One of the things Satan wants us to do is to doubt that we can trust God when he says he loves us, accepts us in Christ, and will never stop loving us. He accuses us mercilessly. Revelation 12:10 says he is "the accuser of the brothers and sisters." It says he accuses us day and night. He pulls at every thread of weakness or unfaithfulness he sees in us, trying to get us to unravel like a cheap sweater. I recently had one of those moments where I saw again how one of my inabilities has affected our ministry. I started beating myself up over it. But then came a flood of thoughts about every weakness I have. The next thing I knew it was at the level of, "You should never have been a pastor. You should not be a leader in a church. You are so inept. It's amazing you've been able to fool people this long. You aren't worthy." After a while I came to my senses and said, "What's going on here?" As soon as I asked the question I knew. Satan was doing what he does so well, accusing me, telling me to forget all I know about who I am in Christ. That's one of the ways he gets us to doubt God.

## TEMPTATION

The message of Satan is you can't trust God, he is neither good nor truthful, so you have to take care of yourself. The core of his appeal is at the end of Genesis 3:5. He says if you listen to him, "you will be like God." And that is at the heart of every temptation he throws your way. *You should be like God. You should be the center of everything. You should be the one who is served and honored. You should be the one who decides what is right and wrong, what is good and bad. You should be the one who has total freedom, complete autonomy and the ability to choose and gain for yourself whatever you want. You should be the one who is in control of all things.*

That's what Satan wants most of all. It literally drives him insane that he cannot have it. So he never stops trying to gain it by doing everything he can at every moment of his existence to fight against God. And the best way he can destroy what God is doing, he believes, is to sell to humans the very same idea that has twisted him into inconceivable evil.

In Matthew 4 Jesus is in the wilderness before launching his public ministry. The Father has led him there to prepare him. He has been fasting for 6 weeks! He is hungry. No, he is famished. Satan shows up in verse 3. “The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’” That sounds like he’s doubting that Jesus is the Son of God, but that’s not what was going on. The Greek grammar of the verse means that the intent of his statement was, “Since you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus knew who he was. Satan knew it too. He wasn’t calling Jesus’ identity into question. He was saying, “Hey, you’re starving out here. But you don’t need to do that. You’re the Son of God. You’ve got the power to solve that problem right now. Just turn the stones into bread and you’ll have something to eat.”

Would there have been something wrong with turning rocks into a nice loaf of sourdough bread? No, Jesus actually would use his power to manipulate matter to produce liquids and food during his ministry. He changed water into wine, and he turned a small amount of food into enough to feed thousands of people. So that was not a problem. Then in what sense was this a temptation? You get a picture of it from the way Jesus responded. In verse 4 he said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Satan was saying, “Hey, the most important thing is that you should take care of you. You have legitimate needs, so you should do whatever you have to do to meet those needs.” Jesus said, “Yes, I have legitimate needs, but taking care of me is *not* the most important thing. The most important thing is doing whatever the Father says, and he has told me to wait and trust him to provide when he sees fit. So doing his will is what life is about.”

Is life about taking care of you, providing for yourself, doing whatever you think is necessary to get what you think you need? That is the line that Satan sells every minute of every day. It fits perfectly with his claim that God can’t be trusted. *God isn’t good. He’s not looking out for you. He’s taking care of himself and trying to keep good from you. So you’d better take care of yourself, because you’re the most important thing in all of creation.*

Satan became blatant with his lies at the end of that session of tempting Jesus out in the desert. Matthew 4:8-9 says, “Again, the devil to him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’” You can have it all. Hey it should belong to you, right? So all you have to do is bow down to me and I’ll give it to you. Easy as pie, no problem.

Satan continually tries to sell the same line. You deserve it. You should be at the center. Life is about you. You should take care of you above everything else. You should have control. You should have what you want. Don’t listen to God because he doesn’t care about you, just decide for yourself what you want and then do whatever is necessary to get it. At their core all of his temptations are based on those same ideas. Here is a statement we should never forget: ***Self service is the religion of hell.***



It's sad what that line of thinking does to us. One odd effect it has is to make us easily offended, easily angered people. I had an odd little experience while we were on vacation. It was a very small thing, but it caught my attention. At the hotel where we stayed for several days there was a statement in some of the material they gave us asking us not to hang towels out on the lanai of our room to dry. So we didn't do that. But one day we had a couple of swim suits that were wet and had no place to hang them in the bathroom to dry. So we just draped them over the sides of the chairs that were on the lanai. It would not have been noticeable to anyone walking by the room because we were not on the ground floor. That night I noticed that the phone in our room was indicating that we had a message. So I checked our message. It was from the hotel and it said they had noticed we had items drying on our lanai. Please remove these items. We did so. It wasn't a big deal. But I noticed that inside I was feeling something. I was a little irked. I couldn't quite understand why. They had a right to ask us not to hang things on the lanai. It wasn't like they were being unreasonable. They weren't attacking me or maligning my character. It wasn't a huge reaction. It was just a tiny little sense of annoyance. But why was it there at all? I've thought a bit about what that was. It certainly wasn't because it would cause us any inconvenience. It had to do with just the fact that I don't like to be even mildly reprimanded for anything. Because I am the center of all things. I should be served and honored at all times. Somewhere inside is a tendency to feel Satan's message even when I know and believe deeply it is wrong.

The enemy's lies pull at us to choose our way, not God's. They lead to disastrous decisions, as evidenced by what happened in Eden. What we absolutely need to learn is that the enemy's lies are intended to ruin us, and every time we listen to them we will hurt other people and we will do harm to ourselves. We need to remember that when we listen to his lies it never makes us more secure, peaceful, joyful people who are full of love. It makes us proud, easily irked, selfish people.

## APPLICATION

### GUARD YOUR HEART

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." The battle is going to take place in your heart. John Eldredge wrote in *Waking The Dead*, "the enemy knows how vital the heart is, even if we do not, and all his forces are fixed upon its destruction. For if he can disable or deaden your heart, then he has effectively foiled the plan of God, which was to create a world where love reigns. By taking out your heart, the enemy takes out you."

He is going to batter your heart with discouragement, accusations and lies. Pay attention to what is going on in your heart and protect it. In football these days they've shaped the rules to aid offense, especially the passing game. It is exceedingly difficult for defensive backs to defend the big, fast wide receivers so prevalent in today's game. Everyone knows that the key to stopping high powered offenses is to pressure the quarterback. Sacking the quarterback is by far, the best

way to shut down an opposing offense. Your heart is the quarterback of your life, and the enemy is going to do everything in his power to sack it. Protect it with all your might.

## FACE YOUR DOUBTS

One of the ways you do that is to face your doubts. The hard thing about doubts is if we just deny them and try to suppress them, we know inside that we are just pretending. When we do that it makes our faith feel vulnerable and weak.

Doubts have to be faced. We have to admit them to ourselves. Then we must test our own doubts. Often that means reminding ourselves that there is reason to reject those doubts. It means recognizing where they are coming from. Yes, it is hard to trust when everything in your life is going horribly. But that is the time to go back to the fundamental truths of what we know about God. We know that he created us. We know that he loves us because he sent his Son into this world to rescue us. We know that nothing can stop him from loving us.

Sometimes it means choosing to believe because we have reason to do so. Sometimes it means choosing to believe because we know where the doubts are coming from and we know they are intended to do us harm.

## REJECT THE LIES

Here is a list of things you should recognize as coming from Satan. God doesn't tell you the truth. God is not good and doesn't care about you. God doesn't love you because you are worthless. You are the center of everything, it's all about you. You should decide what you want and do whatever is necessary to get it. These are the basic attacks of the enemy. Every single thing he says in his attempts to destroy you will be variations on those few ideas.

When you hear those lies, reject them. Remember that catcher I encountered. He was not looking out for me, he was trying to make me fail. That's exactly what we need to remember when we hear these themes. They are aimed at ruining us, so we need to reject them. Just tell Satan you know he's there and you know what he's up to. Tell him now that you're on to him, it's not going to work. Say no to him. James 4:7 says if we resist him, he will flee from us.