

On Guard!

Have you ever felt embattled, attacked, under pressure, caught in a snare not of your own making? The fact is we are in a battle- a spiritual battle in which the enemy seeks to disarm us, render us powerless and ineffective. Even if we are not destroyed we can be weakened, rendered useless for God's purposes.

The apostle Paul put it like this: "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12)

When we were living abroad, it seemed there was a disproportionate number of missionaries that had to return to their home country. Sometimes because of lack of funds, but often due to sickness or ill health, and occasionally even death threats. The battle was very real and sometimes the oppression was almost tangible.

However, we live in country where the enemy's attacks are often much more subtle. Gradual erosion of our values; the temptation to compromise our faith; doubts and uncertainties; questioning truth we hold (once held?) dear; ridicule - and so on.

Some suffer physically as do many Christians in parts of the world today; others suffer mentally or emotionally. We were created for relationship - relationship with God first and foremost - and relationship with each other. No wonder this is a major source of spiritual attack. This is not to say that every time something goes wrong it is a Satanic attack. We live in a fallen and broken world where things go wrong or are out of kilter; where sometimes we go wrong and then have to face the consequences. Jesus said, "In this world you will have many trials and sorrows." (John 16:33) But he goes on to say, "But take heart, because I have overcome the world." We pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Roll on that day when Jesus comes again and puts everything to rights.

When the human body is under attack there can be three reactions: play dead, flight or fight. So when you feel under spiritual attack, do you 'play dead', hiding your faith as if it didn't exist; run to a spiritual corner putting up walls where you can't be reached; or stand and fight using God's word as your weapon?

So in the meantime, what to do?

Be on guard: "Stay alert", says Peter, "watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) Don't get separated - fellowship is important, we need each other. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

So please pray especially for those on the front line: for our leaders, Ed, Emma, Tim, Caroline and their families. And particularly for the Christian workers living abroad who we support: Clare Grimble, the Kakishes, the Nekounams, and for Damien 'Damo' Miller who is returning to the UK due to health reasons, together with his wife, Annet, who has just been granted her visa and who now can come to England with their children Patience and Conrad.

Damien is coming to our bring-and-share tea at 5pm tonight and then sharing his story at our 6pm service. Please come and meet him.

Steve