

Dr. Dan *for* Today

Fighting *for* Your Character

Life is a battle. The pages of history are filled with battles and wars. We are in a war of character each day. The outcome of our life hangs in the balance. Will we succumb to the "world, the flesh, and the devil"? Or will we be conquerors in the inner person?

The battle is simple and straightforward. The prize is clear. It is all found in Revelation 2:7:

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life which is in the paradise of God."

Each of us fights these battles daily. Our physical body needs to be built up enough to withstand disease, viruses, etc. It takes more fighting power the older we get to win these battles.

The same is true of our mental and emotional life. If we want to maintain balance between the inner and outer person, we must intentionally make choices that require self-sacrifice and inconvenience. Character is something worth fighting for. Character aspects are the elite platoon of soldiers that patrol the parameters of our lives. Once they've been recognized and developed through forced training, these aspects of character protect us. Each aspect of character (honesty, integrity, love, loyalty, and self-discipline) to name a few, scans the horizon-like radar to detect upcoming personal battles. Is it any wonder why so many in our time succumb to the battles and become captives of the "world, the flesh, and the devil"? They have little or no character radar. They do not detect upcoming battles, and when they are in them, they rarely have an emergency battle plan that has been practiced over and over again until it becomes automatic.

For the believer, the core of character is holiness. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) We know there will be trouble and battles ahead. If our radar is turned on and we have trained well and are in a state of readiness, we can eliminate the enemy's element of surprise.

Here are some other word pictures that relate to understanding the battle for our character.

1. The more pressure we experience on the outside of our lives, the more we need to build up the inner person to withstand that pressure. The example that comes to my mind is that of a submarine. The deeper a submarine goes, the more pressure it experiences on the outer hull. It needs to increase the pressure on the inside to withstand being crushed.

2. Many of us do not realize that the spiritual battles, which they cannot see, are like computer viruses that can infect the hard drives of our minds. All of us need to protect our operating system by downloading God's word and the viral scan of His promises into our lives daily. The "evil one" is in the business of creating new viruses to infect the programs of our lives.

3. In recent years, character development has been de-emphasized not only in the school system but also in churches. In our postmodern, post Christian world where there are few if any absolutes, we have adopted the liberal humanistic philosophy of man being basically good in his character and very capable from that goodness to be able to make his own choices for himself. These choices are subjective and constitute a person evaluating him or herself not by what Scripture says, but by what our Constitution and Bill of Rights say. We've entered a time where absolutes of character development and behavior have been replaced by opinion polls.

4. We now live in a society of passivity. Our feelings of self-worth and "winning the battle" are produced more by outer influences and perceived needs than the boundaries in the inner person. Our feelings of worth and value are more stimulated Monday morning by the winning of our sports teams than by developing our inner life through a well-understood battle plan. We need to understand the enemy and how he seeks to devour us and render us impotent.

5. Character development from a Christian perspective has a great reward. There is blessing from hard work in the inner person. The blessing and result is a life that reflects Jesus Christ more, a life of holiness. And the result is the privilege of partaking of the "fruits" of the Tree of Life.

6. One of the main issues that we face today in our society is that we do not have a sense of the outcomes that we want. We do not have a clear understanding of what outcomes we want for our marriages, our children, ourselves, and how we want to develop our character and the character of our loved ones. Many view this as a preposterous idea and very paternal in nature. Many in our culture today believe that imposing our values of character on others is inappropriate for that person. Little do they know that if they are not careful in their marriage and raising their children they can be likened to a "city without walls" which can leave those relationships open and vulnerable to other dominant and well marketed forces and sources in our society. All of us are subservient to something or someone. Living a life "by default" based on independence and some definition of personal freedom, does not necessitate that we are free. Real freedom and hope come from developing character in the inner person.

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